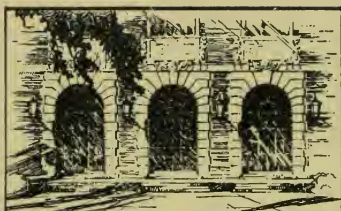


SARAH:

A SURVIVAL

Sydney Christian



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SARAH: A SURVIVAL

BY

SYDNEY CHRISTIAN,

AUTHOR OF "LYDIA."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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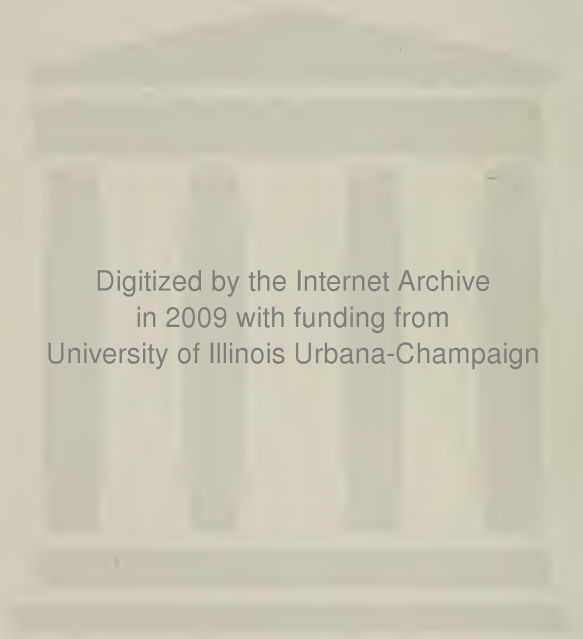
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PART IV.

SARAH THORNBOROUGH GROWS UP.

“The fear of man in its best sense is the beginning of wisdom and true ethics. And there is no greater folly than the sacrilege of analysis. When religion in any country resolves itself into oratory or intimacy, it will soon have to die back again into the mystery of worship, if it is ever to be eternal.—It is quite possible to have the pen of a too ready writer.”

SARAH: A SURVIVAL.



CHAPTER I.

THE rejoicings at Leigh Court to celebrate the coming of age of Gideon Leigh were of the same splendid and merry nature as those belonging to the coming of age of many another eldest son. Sir Godolphin's present to him was a slender and beautiful animal, which had been for some time coveted by both father and son in the stables of a friend, who was opportunely selling his place and going abroad.

"Flash knows a thing or two; you say where you want to go, and, bless my soul, lad, why there you are *in a flash*, or rather *on a Flash*. A beauty—such a beauty! Eh?

What?" cried Sir Godolphin Leigh, as he stood arm in arm with his son watching the finely-bred animal being led up and down by the groom.

Father and son were both beaming; it was difficult to say which was the better pleased.

"Mustn't let Sally mount Flash, my boy, or there will be the very devil to pay. Flash and Sally have both got tempers. Eh?"

Gideon laughed joyously.

"You know Sarah can manage any animal," he said.

"Eh? What? Of course; but when you and Sally are spliced, I shall give her the very ditto of Flash. I know where to lay my finger on the pretty creature, and a pretty penny she will cost; but nothing will be too good for your wife, lad. Eh? God bless my soul, what a pair you will make! Not a better grown pair, nor a pluckier, nor a more God-fearing in all the country, I'll go bail."

"My dear father, you will certainly choke in your pride, if you go on like this," cried Gideon, laughing.

“Pride! Eh? What? Pooh, lad! Who has a better cause to be proud than I have, I should like to know? ’Tis a pity about the name, to be sure, but I can’t quarrel with your uncle over that; and when all is said and done you are already half a Thornborough, after all. Leigh-Thornborough don’t sound so bad. I wish Fred wasn’t quite such a mealy-faced, chicken-hearted chap. Monstrous queer I should have bred such a son.”

“Fred is all right; there is an awful lot in Fred. Give him time; you’ll be proud of him yet,” declared Gideon.

“Good lad, good lad, to take his part. Bless me, what a couple you’ll be to continue the Thornborough line! Our Sally as mother of a family! God bless my soul, Dan will be glad to hear children’s voices in the old place again. For an old bachelor, ’tis amazing how he takes to brats.”

Gideon Leigh answered nothing; he turned the conversation into another channel, and they walked towards his stepmother, who was coming to meet them.

That winter Sarah Thornborough came out, and the following spring Dan Thornborough sent her up to town to be presented by Lady Leigh, who kept her with her in London till the middle of the summer.

Gideon began to take in hand the Leigh Court estate, and was appalled at the mismanagement that was going on under the incapable rule of his hospitable, easy-going father. He was biding his time in the matter of proposing to his cousin. In spite of her travels, her paying and receiving of visits, the popularity which her position, her straightforward manners, and her prospects had secured for her, she still remained, as he ruefully called her to himself, "so dreadfully young." No attentions of his, no devotion, no chance remarks of other people, seemed so far in the least to have opened her eyes; she took everything in good part and as a matter of course, and finally she returned from her season in town as affectionate, frank, joyous, and in as rude health as when she had started.

Dan Thornborough drove to the station

to meet his darling and take her from her aunt's charge. She sprang out of the train, hugged him with all her usual fervour, and cried—

“ Oh, Uncle Dan, I have had a splendid time, but I have been homesick after you, every minute of it.”

Then she climbed up into the phaeton, and insisted on driving him home, Young George sitting behind one broad grin of satisfaction at beholding his young mistress again.

“ How is Aunt Rachel ? All right ? I'm glad I went with Aunt Mary ; Aunt Rachel would have been a wreck with the late hours, whereas Aunt Mary never turned a hair. How are Jacob and Mrs. Frant and Susan ? Why has not Gideon come ? ”

“ What shall I answer first, child ? ” said her uncle, as he scanned her face anxiously to see if she had not suffered from her late dissipations.

“ Answer anyhow you like, so long as you talk to me. You naughty old man not to have come up just once to see me ! I wanted to show you to one or two girls I met, who

were idiots enough to declare that all old men are hideous. Ah, they have never seen my beautiful, courtly, kingly, stately——”

“Hush, hush!” cried her uncle, fairly laughing. “I have had my day. It is time you began to think about a younger man.”

“So I will as soon as I find one as dear and sweet as you.”

“Ah, child, I would like to leave you with a good husband before I die.”

Sarah laughed merrily.

“Dear, do forgive me. But you are such a wicked old raven, you know. Croaking horrible misfortune like that.”

“A good husband is not a misfortune, is he?”

“Tiresome, bad evader of truth! You *know* I referred to your dying. There, don’t let us talk about husbands; we don’t want any inconvenient interlopers among you and me and Gideon and Aunt Rachel.”

“Then, you have not lost your heart in town?” pursued Dan Thornborough, regarding her wistfully.

She guided the horses skilfully round a

dangerous corner, then turned and looked at him with her clear, honest eyes and said—

“Why, Uncle Dan, did you really think I had fallen in love with somebody? What a curious idea! I like to amuse myself, that is all.”

“But you wrote me word of a vast number of partners at balls, and of men who rode with you,” he insisted, anxious once and for all to ascertain his niece’s views.

“Oh yes; there were simply heaps—well, a great number,” she amended, seeing her uncle’s eyebrows raised, and recollecting his objection to hyperbole. “And Aunt Mary seemed to think one or two of them would have proposed if I had let them. Such a queer way of talking. I never heard Aunt Rachel speak so. People don’t propose to, or accept each other when they hardly know each other, do they?”

“I have occasionally heard of such things,” he replied, trying not to smile.

“And then, just picture to yourself my marrying a man who could only ride and hated reading, or a man who only liked

going to balls all night, or drinking brandies and sodas, or a man who couldn't drain a field or milk a cow, or thought Shakespeare and Chaucer old fogies! I could not, Uncle Dan, I really could not. I don't think you can have any idea of how very uninteresting most of them were; and hardly any laughed out like Uncle Dol, or spoke clearly, like you. Half made, *I* call them, unfinished."

"Unfinished? Were they badly dressed?" demanded her uncle, gravely.

"Now you are laughing at me. Well, you know we used to think Percy rather a poor specimen, but beside many I have met I call him quite a jewel; at any rate, he is enthusiastic about going abroad and about his bicycle rides. Lots of the men and girls I met had no enthusiasms, and seemed to look on me as a sort of queer product, even when I amused them most. Am I queer, Uncle Dan?"

Dan Thornborough pondered a moment, then said—

"You are no queerer than all the other people who venture to think for themselves."

"Just what I thought. Oh, and then another thing. There seem to be so many celebrated persons to be met. People are always saying to me, 'What! don't you know *her*? A most remarkable woman;' or, 'What! do you mean to say you never heard of *his* novel, or *his* poems? Quite the most remarkable productions of our time.' And I dare say they are, Uncle Dan; but then, you see, 'our time' may not happen to be producing much, so it is not much honour to be best where everybody is only mediocre."

Dan Thornborough laughed gently to himself.

"Did you happen to make that kind of remark to the lions themselves?" he asked.

"No, I don't think so," she replied, considering the question thoughtfully. "I think I only said it to the people who were showing off the lions. I do remember asking one man, who was simply gushing—don't laugh, you dear—he was really gushing over somebody's poems, and I asked him if they were anything like Herrick, or Shelley, or Chaucer, or Byron, and he said, 'Oh no, they are

quite a different style; much more modern, and very strong.' I don't know what he meant! And oh, Uncle Dan, is not our grandmother an object, with all that false, frizzled hair? Why does not she wear a sweet lace cap, like Aunt Rachel?"

"You seem to have picked out all the deficiencies in your town acquaintances, and none of their virtues," remarked her uncle.

"Oh, their virtues are merely an accidental absence of vices; their deficiencies are painstakingly cultivated, which is much more interesting," she cried laughingly. "Ah, there is Aunt Rachel in the porch. And how glorious our roses are over it this year! There is nothing like home. Aunt Rachel, Aunt Rachel, you dainty china shepherdess, here I am!"

Miss Thornborough embraced her niece with gentle fervour.

"It is pleasant to see you again, child; I have missed you more than I should have thought possible. I have had tea placed in the arbour."

“How nice of you ; and I hope we have got almond cakes !”

Miss Thornborough smiled.

“Yes, Mrs. Frant remembered your favourites. And Gideon will be here to help us eat them, and will remain here over the Sabbath.”

“Splendid !” cried Sarah. “I love to see him come tearing up the avenue on Flash ; he looks like Sir Galahad or Sir Philip Sidney.”

On the following Sunday morning, when Old George and the coach stood waiting at the door, loaded already with those Frants who were going to church, Dan Thornborough turned suddenly to his nephew and said—

“You drive, lad. Your aunt and I will sit behind you.”

“Why, Uncle Dan ?” cried Sarah, astonished. “You have driven ever since I can remember ; it does not seem right for Gideon to do it.”

Her uncle waved his hand with an impatience unusual with him, and Gideon silently

helped his cousin up and took his place at her side.

"It is Folly in front, and Wisdom behind," cried Sarah, laughing. "Everybody will think you have broken your arm, Uncle Dan, to see you sitting there so meek and mild beside Aunt Rachel."

A fresh hymn-book had been introduced in the old church since the childhood of Gideon Leigh and Sarah Thornborough, and the copper bowl had long ceased to be used for the collections. The cousins were both tall enough now to see over the moreen curtains, which had been lowered in Miss Thornborough's corner because she said they made her feel "stuffy," but when the congregation sat down, the family were as completely hidden as ever. The sermon being of unusual length, Gideon hunted up "Olney Hymns" and handed the book open to Sarah at the old familiar page of "The Kite; or, Pride must have a Fall."

"I know it by heart," she whispered, giving him smile for smile.

Then Gideon took up an old Bible lying

on the cushion beside him ; it fell open at the book of Genesis. A verse caught his eye ; he slowly passed the Bible towards his cousin, keeping his finger on the verse. Sarah read—

“ And Jacob served seven years for Rachel ; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.”

She looked in his face and whispered—

“ Did any one love Aunt Rachel like that ? ”

It seemed to her cousin impossible that she should misunderstand, yet he knew there was no shadow of pretence in Sarah’s nature, and that she had indeed missed his meaning.

“ No, dear,” he sighed, closing the Bible. “ I will explain another time.”

Then Sarah opened her Bible at her favourite life of Gideon, and turned over the chapters.

Presently she pointed to the lines, “ As thou art, so were they ; each one resembled the children of a king.”

“ I am always glad Uncle Dan brought us up to be like that, aren’t you ? ” she whispered.

Her cousin nodded.

"As the man is, so is his strength," were the next lines her finger stopped at. "That is why you are so strong. 'He died in a good old age.' I hope you will live to a good old age, dear boy."

He smiled, and laid his hand upon hers.

"Hush!" he said. "You are as bad as when you were a baby. Aunt Rachel is looking horrified."

When service was over, Dan Thornborough and his party stood about longer than usual, greeting their acquaintances. Some of the Leighs, Gideon's uncle and cousins, joined them, and some of the Howards.

"What are we to conclude from your being Jehu this morning, with Sarah beside you?" asked one of them, facetiously.

"Oh, nothing. My uncle wished it. I dare say I shall not do it again," returned Gideon, carelessly.

"*I* am going to drive home!" announced Sarah, when, in a few minutes, the coach came up. Nobody made any objection, so

Sarah climbed up. "Sit by me going back," she implored of her uncle.

So Gideon took his place by his aunt, and, the Frants having been packed within and without, away they started down the road.

"What a curious survival!" a visitor, new to the neighbourhood, remarked to a Howard. "How long will it all last, I wonder?"

A few days later an enemy began to attack Sir Godolphin Leigh. Gout. He was very angry, and still more so when his doctor ordered him to take foreign waters. But after much persuasion he agreed to go, provided that his son would go with him as well as his wife.

"Symes must look after things. Eh? What? Incompetent? I don't care, lad, I am not going to stir without you. If you and Sally had made it up, I should have had to do without you, but as you are such a shilly-shally you may as well wait now till we get back. God bless my soul, you can pop the question then as soon as you like, and we'll have the wedding before Christmas."

So his son reluctantly consented. It was late autumn before they returned to Leigh Court, and it was early in an unusually cold December before Gideon betook himself to stay at Meads, resolved that he would remain there till he had made Sarah understand his wishes by one means or another.

The Meads drawing-room was a particularly attractive place on a winter evening. Miss Thornborough and her brother each had their special chair near the fire, with lamp and table beside it. A long, old-fashioned sofa, piled with cushions, faced the hearth, and an enormous Spanish leather screen placed round the door kept off all draught. It was Dan Thornborough's invariable custom in the winter to dress early, and settle himself here to read for an hour before dinner. It was the hour Gideon and Sarah had loved best as children, it was the hour now that they always endeavoured to spend with him. Their aunt seldom appeared till five minutes before the dinner-bell rang.

Here one evening came Sarah as usual, and drawing up a low chair to the fire, proceeded to warm her feet, screening her face with a fan, and relating the events of the afternoon's skating expedition to her uncle.

The firelight shone upon her white dress, and danced upon a string of opals, a Thornborough heirloom, which was round her throat. Her uncle placed his book on the table beside him, took off his glasses, and, resting an arm on each elbow of his chair, gave her his full attention.

Presently Gideon came in, also dressed for dinner, and cast his long length on the sofa behind his cousin. She continued speaking—

“He spent all day with us. He was so kind. He had a sad, stern face. He said he made agricultural implements.”

“Did he?” cried Gideon. “I never knew that. Supposing you had spent the afternoon with Houseman or one of his men, how queer we should have thought it! One can talk to such odd people abroad.”

"Odd?" said Sarah. "What was there odd about him? He was a gentleman, and quite as well educated as any of us, and much more interesting."

"Thank you!" cried both her hearers, laughing.

"Agricultural implements!" repeated Dan Thornborough. "It could not have been Lawson himself; he is a capital fellow. What age was he, do you suppose?"

"Thirty-two," announced Sarah, promptly.

"Too young. Lawson must be five and fifty if he is a day. And so you found him interesting, did you, Sarah?"

"Awfully! Very, I mean. Actually more so than Mr. Gray," she added, turning suddenly round and looking mischievously at Gideon.

He frowned.

"I did not know you had been seeing much of him," he said.

"Oh yes; he came ever so often when I was in town with Aunt Mary."

"You never told me," said her uncle, gravely. "I understood he had gone abroad."

"Yes, so he has now ; we saw a good deal of him before he went, though, and I told him to be sure to come and see us often when he comes back," she declared again, laughing in Gideon's chagrined face.

"I wish you had not. I told you before I did not like him," he said.

Sarah's eyebrows went up defiantly.

"I can't always undertake to dislike everybody you do," she said. "You have interfered ever so often with me lately. I wish you would not. I can manage my own affairs, and choose my own friends, without your help."

Her cousin flushed red.

"Gently, Sarah. Gideon is in the right," said her uncle.

"What do you mean ?" she demanded.

"I mean that Mr. Gray of Gray's Wick is not a suitable man for you to know ; you may recollect that I have never invited him to Meads."

"I don't care a bit about him ; it is being interfered with by Gideon, that I hate. If I like to talk to him as much as ever I can,

when I meet him out, what has that got to do with Gideon? I don't like my friends to be found fault with without cause."

"Your *friend*! Good heavens! And 'without cause!'" ejaculated Gideon, getting up and excitedly pacing the room.

"What do you mean, pray?" demanded Sarah, also getting up and facing him.

Dan Thornborough sat watching them sadly. Their passionate indignation came to him as an echo out of past years. He was pondering whether it would be worth while to produce his experience for their benefit. Sarah had dragged the elastic on which her necklace was strung till it reached her mouth; she held the opals against her white teeth, biting them angrily. It was the childish action over again of biting at her curls, which action had always preceded a storm.

Gideon continued to pace the room in a nervous, annoyed way.

"What do you mean?" demanded Sarah again. "I hate thrusts in the dark; if you have anything to say against Mr. Gray, say

it out like a man. Innuendoes are the weapons of a *coward*," she added emphatically.

Gideon turned white, halted in front of her, opened his mouth to speak, looked at his uncle, then at Sarah, and said nothing.

"Have you ever known Gideon guilty of a cowardly act in all his life?" asked Dan Thornborough.

Sarah continued to bite her necklace, her nostrils dilated with passion, her eyes were flashing, she beat her white-shod foot impatiently on the floor.

"No," she retorted, "never! But you see he has nothing to say. Why does he stand wavering there? Speak, Gideon, can't you?"

Gideon's eyes turned appealingly towards his uncle.

"Tell her as much as you think right," he muttered.

"Tell me *everything*!" she insisted, with a stamp of her foot. "I am as much grown up as you are. Really, Gideon, your behaviour is perfectly ridiculous."

Then Dan Thornborough roused himself from watching Gideon's dark, tender face, and Sarah's angry, gleaming figure.

"Children, we desire to know, always to know. We do not ask whether we shall be wiser or better for the knowledge, we only ask that we may know what other people know. I will tell you, Sarah, why both Gideon and I object to Mr. Gray. Gideon has long known it, and it now seems to me better that you should know also. Mr. Gray has three children, and the lady with whom they live ought to be Mrs. Gray of Gray's Wick."

There was silence for a moment, while Sarah looked at the pained faces of her uncle and cousin.

"Like Charles the Second, in the 'English History'!" she cried scornfully, and the disgusted jerk she gave to the necklace broke the string and sent the beads shimmering along the carpet. She flung the rest after them.

Gideon stooped and began picking them up.

"Cad!" she declared again. "What a

good thing we know ! Now pray, Gideon, why should *you* have been so angry about it all ? ”

But Dan Thornborough had come to the conclusion that nothing would break the barrier that seemed of late to have been growing up between the cousins, unless some third person spoke plainly. He also felt that his revelation to her, made with pain to himself and Gideon, had merely conveyed to her a kind of historical fact.

He pointed with his long, thin hand to the chair Sarah had risen from, and, motioning Gideon to another, he said, with the ring of command that no one had ever been known to question or to disobey—

“ Oblige me, both of you, by sitting down, and giving me your attention while I relate to you a passage out of my past life. You are right, Sarah, you are no longer a child ; it is time you knew all that a grown person may know. You are a child in all that concerns affairs of the heart. I am about to enlighten you.”

Gideon started, but said nothing.

“When I was about the age of Gideon, or a few years older, I fell in love. Her name was Dulcie. She promised to marry me. A few weeks before our wedding, she broke her engagement to me, and married another man. I and others had done our best to prevent the acquaintance, and were only met with the same kind of scorn as that to which you have been treating Gideon. He was well known as a gambler and a hard drinker. He had personal attractions and a persuasive manner; she had money, and was overpersuaded. We had planned our wedding-tour abroad together. I had never been abroad. I never have been. Your father,” he went on, turning to Gideon, “was more than a brother to me at that time. I remained here and managed Meads. Your Aunt Rachel’s promised husband died about that time; she and I have lived here ever since, as you know.” He paused.

Sarah was looking at him intently.

“Is that all!” she asked.

“All! Is it not enough? But I forget. I must tell you the end. He beat her, he

cursed her, and I heard of it, and was helpless. At last, one cold night such as this, I was sitting here, in this very chair. Your aunt had gone to bed ; I was alone. There came a tap at the window behind you. I was always thinking of her. I knew who it was. She knew our habits well ; she must have known I should be here. I opened the window, and there on the terrace she stood shivering in the snow. I helped her in here to the fire, just where you are sitting, Sarah. I fetched her wine, I warmed and restored her. Then she said he had beaten her so that she had run away to me. She was no older than you, child, and I loved her madly, yet could say nothing. It was, in truth, an awful hour. You cannot understand that yet. Her paroxysm of resentment passed. She began to talk of going back. She would not let me call your aunt, and I dared not offer to drive her home. She went out by that window, as she had come in, and I walked with her through the wood, and out on to the high-road over the frozen snow, and left her at her own gate. There

we parted. I never saw her again, and nobody but myself knows of that meeting, for she has long been dead, and I have only related it to you now lest another heart be broken by another girl who in her ignorance passes by a love that has only fidelity to recommend itself."

He ceased. Sarah looked round, but Gideon had risen and gone quietly out of the room.

"Do you mean *me*? and that Gideon is in love with *me*?" she demanded.

"Even so," said her uncle, almost absently, for his thoughts were busy with the past, and the fire of youth flashed once more in his eyes.

Then Sarah left her chair, and, falling on her knees beside him, buried her face in his breast and cried—

"Oh, Uncle Dan, how sorry I am for you! Fancy her coming in here for you to comfort her, poor girl! It must have been very hard for you."

"*Hard!*" he repeated. "Hard! Ay. That hour was ever present with me, for many a long year."

“How odd about Gideon! I never guessed. Poor Gideon!”

He stroked her hair lovingly, as when she was a child; he was moved too greatly to say more. They remained thus till Miss Thornborough, wrapped up in a white shawl, for she had been ill, came into the room, saying—

“What is all this about Gideon? He is gone, I hear.”

“Gone!” cried the others in astonishment.

Sarah got up off the floor; she picked up a stray opal bead and put it with the others that Gideon had collected into an enamelled box that lay on the table. “I’m sorry I was in such an awful rage,” she thought penitently.

“Yes,” pursued her aunt; “he told Young George to saddle Flash, as he was going back to Leigh Court for the night, and he was to tell you, Dan, that he would be over here again before lunch to-morrow morning.”

“I see,” was all that her brother said, and, the bell ringing at that moment, they went in to dinner.

Sarah stole downstairs again that night after she and her aunt had retired. She went back to the drawing-room, where she found her uncle standing by the fire looking at a miniature. He silently held it out to her, and she saw the face of the girl whom he had loved all his life.

"How pretty!" she said, then laid her cheek against his in mute sympathy.

"Ay," he said, without noticing her, but still continuing to look at the face in the picture,—"ay, when I looked for good, then came evil unto me; and when I waited for light, there came darkness. 'Yet men see not the bright light which is in the clouds; but the wind passeth and cleanseth them.' Sarah, remember this when the clouds pass over your life; remember that in time the wind will come and cleanse them away. You and Gideon have been to me as a pleasant wind, as the bright light. It grieves me greatly that you should have spoken so sharply to him. The spoken word can never be recalled."

"And it grieves me too; that is why I

came down again. It all seems so odd about his wanting to marry me. I can't take that in yet. But I think I see now how much he must suffer when he thinks I like anybody better than him."

"Good night," said her uncle, closing the miniature. "Good night, Sarah. If I have made you understand Gideon, I shall not regret having told you about this. Ay, the lad suffers. I have suffered for more than forty years, and I can tell you it is an ill thing to bear. Spare him if you can."

His niece kissed him, and went thoughtfully away to her room.

At Leigh Court, about ten o'clock on the same evening, Fred Leigh, home for his holidays, was sitting reading over the fire. His father and mother had driven out to dinner, the servants were shut away in another wing of the house, his little sisters were in bed, his elder brother was at Meads. The night was bitter cold; he piled on coal, and stretched his feet into the fender.

Suddenly a noise as of horses' hoofs sounded on that portion of the gravel that, close to the house, had been swept from the snow. Fred lifted his head, listened a moment, then, throwing down his book, went out into the hall and opened the front door. Instantly a cold nose was thrust against him, and he recognized Flash. Peering out further, and not seeing his brother, he stood for a moment thinking.

"Where is he, Flash?" he asked.

She lifted her beautiful head, and looked at him.

"By Jove, something must have happened to the dear old chap!" he said to himself. Then, seizing the bridle, he led the horse round to the stable-yard, summoned a groom, and between them they harnessed the light cart in which his sisters were accustomed to be driven out.

"Now go off as quick as you can for Dr. Leslie. I am going to drive along the road to Meads till I find him. And look here, Tom; if you get back before us, just come along the road after me."

Thus he gave his orders rapidly. The frightened maids had come out with shawls over their heads to hear the news and offer suggestions. In a few moments Tom had galloped off for the doctor, and Fred was urging the sturdy little pony along the frozen snow. For three miles he drove, then, coming to the turn in the road leading on to the little bridge, he began to go more slowly, for a thought struck him. Was it possible that his brother had taken the short cut over the fields, which would bring him out where the stream crossed the footpath, easily enough walked through by Flash in ordinary weather, but to-night frozen hard, as also the slope down to it? Gideon never could have come that way; he had warned him, Fred, only the day before, not to go riding across there. Nevertheless Fred turned the pony's head, went up the lane, and there on the frozen edge of the path lay a black patch on the white earth, Gideon Leigh, with the cold clear winter moon shining on his white face. Fred jumped down, raised his brother's

head on his knee, and poured brandy down his throat from the flask he had brought with him. He swallowed it, but did not open his eyes. Fred Leigh was square and stoutly built, and for his age very strong. He lifted his brother in his arms, put him into the low cart, covered him up with a rug, and drove him home as fast as the snow-covered roads permitted. He arrived at the house as the doctor came up to it. They carried Gideon up to his room and put him to bed, but it was long before they could restore any vitality to his frozen body. The doctor said little, but Fred, anxiously watching his face, was not reassured by its expression. All the household was astir when 'Sir Godolphin and his wife got home. Nobody knew how it had happened; Gideon had not spoken. His father blustered and fumed, and was finally prevailed upon by Dr. Leslie to wait till daylight before sending for a great man from town for a consultation. The doctor would remain for the night himself, he said; every one else had better go to bed.

"I should like to stay," said Fred, who had never left the room.

"Eh? What? You, Fred? Why, bless my soul, it was you found my lad, so it was! Monstrous sharp of you to remember the brandy, too. Stay, if you like. Pack him off, Leslie, if he is in the way."

So Fred stayed. The house became still at last. Fred never stirred, but sat with his eyes fixed on his brother's face. Doctor Leslie glanced at him from time to time with interest. Two o'clock rang from the church tower. Gideon opened his eyes; they fell upon Fred.

"Sarah," he murmured.

"Shall I fetch her?" asked Fred, bending over him.

"Sarah," moaned Gideon again.

"I will go and fetch her, old chap; don't you bother." And Fred left the room. Creeping cautiously through the silent house he reached the stables. Flash stood there, the swiftest horse among them, the only one Fred had never dared to ride. He saddled her, mounted, galloped off down the

road, forgetting to be afraid of Flash's well-known speed. Flash grasped the situation, and never stopped till she brought him up to Meads. Here Fred got down and made use of the simple expedient of throwing snow up at Sarah's window. She, busied with thinking over the evening's conversation with her uncle, was, for a wonder, wide awake, and at the second handful of snow she opened the window and looked out.

"Make haste and come down!" called Fred, in a low voice. "Gideon has had an accident, and he wants you."

"Where is he?" cried Sarah, while her heart gave an awful, unaccustomed beat.

"At home. Oh, Sarah, do make haste. I want to get back."

In five minutes Sarah had huddled on her clothes, and, wrapped in a fur cloak, she came softly out of the house.

"Do you mean to say you have come on Flash? Bravo, Fred! But how am I to go?"

They looked at each other.

"The stables are locked ; it will take such a time to wake up everybody," said Fred, reluctantly.

"Bring Flash to the mounting-block ; she must carry us both," declared Sarah.

"Oh, I say, you had better ride her ; I'll walk back," he urged.

"Not if I know it, Fred, when you are as anxious as I am. Come on. I'm going to ride like a man ; there is nobody to see," she cried, as she sprang up.

"You guide ; you are a better hand at it than I am, and we want to get back quickly," said Fred, as he got up behind her.

And they started off. When they had gone a mile, Sarah said suddenly—

"Fred, I never told Uncle Dan. Shall we go back ?"

"No, no ; Tom can ride over early. You are a brick to have been so quick."

"Fred, is he very bad ?"

"I don't know. I think so," he answered with a catch in his voice which made Sarah shiver.

They rode on in silence. The stars

glittered overhead, the fields white with snow stretched on either side, the clear moon made the world as bright as day, not a sound was to be heard except the thud of the horse's hoofs on the hardened snow.

How the cousins managed to reach Leigh Court they never knew. One idea possessed them both, and, they declared, the horse also, to the exclusion of danger and discomfort—the idea of reaching Gideon. Dr. Leslie, still watching by his bed, heard the door open softly, and turned to see them come in, bringing a great whiff of cold night air in their clothes.

Sarah Thornborough went and kneeled down by the bed and spoke her cousin's name.

His hand closed over hers, and he muttered—

“That's all right.”

Sarah said nothing. She stared across the bed in wonder at Dr. Leslie. He put his finger to his lips, and the silence continued.

The next day early, Dan Thornborough came over, bringing with him Young George,

who had implored to be allowed to come, if for only the day. By the afternoon the great man from London had arrived, and was shut up for a long time with Dr. Leslie.

Sir Godolphin stalked impatiently up and down the dining-room, waiting for their report. His brother-in-law sat staring into the fire with his head resting on his hand.

"Eh? What? Here you are at last. How long before you can set him on his legs again?" demanded Sir Godolphin, as the doctors entered at last.

It was the strange doctor who answered him.

"Eh, eh? What does he mean, Leslie? Come, speak out, man. You and I have known each other long enough."

Dr. Leslie did his best to explain to his old friend.

"God bless my soul, Dan, do you hear? What's the use of having a fellow down from town if he can't give us a better report than this, eh?" and he stood looking from one grave face to another in a hurt, surprised manner, as of one who feels he is being trifled with.

"He may linger a few hours longer, possibly a day or two," said the strange doctor to Dan Thornborough, who had never spoken.

"Leslie, is that true? Eh?" gasped Sir Godolphin, seizing him by the arm.

Dr. Leslie only nodded. He, like every one else, was very fond of Gideon Leigh. The father fell into a chair at the table and buried his face in his arms; the uncle stood stiff, silent, like a marble statue, and received further details.

By the evening Gideon's old friends were in his room. One by one they had dropped in, and sat or stood about in hopeless sorrow. Young George sat by his master's head and supported the pillows. Jacob Frant and Fred Leigh leaned with folded arms over the foot of the bed; side by side sat his father and uncle; Sarah kneeled at his other side, for Gideon had just recovered some degree of consciousness, and was speaking.

"I was thinking of other things, and I did not notice which way I had taken, till Flash slipped. I don't remember any more."

"I'll have her shot," groaned his father.

"No, my dear father, you won't. It was not her fault. I guided her there. I must have hit my head against a stone. I am done for, I expect. I give her to you, Fred."

His brother made some inarticulate sound.

"George!"

"Sir!"

"Do you remember our first rat hunt? Put me up higher, there's a good fellow. Keep my gun. You have got it to clean, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir," choked Young George.

"Fred, old man, was it you who picked me up, and shoved all that brandy down my throat?"

"Yes, old chap."

"Father!"

"Eh, lad, yes, what is it?"

Gideon made an effort to reach his father's hand. Sir Godolphin leaned forward and took his son's.

Gideon's eyes closed. Jacob Frant's voice broke the silence.

"How shall we give thee up, Gideon? How can we spare thee? Now is our grief

heavier than the sand of the sea. Oh that God would take me instead, and leave this young life! Behold, He taketh away: who can hinder Him? Oh that one might plead with God as a man pleadeth with his neighbour! Nevertheless He will not fail thee. Fear thou not, Gideon, neither be thou dismayed."

Down Jacob's tanned cheeks the slow tears were coursing; his bushy eyebrows were drawn together, and his knotted hands were clasped on the wooden foot of the old-fashioned bed.

Gideon opened his eyes and smiled at him.

"I am not afraid, Jacob. What fear should I have? You have talked to me about this at one time or another since I was a small boy. I am very glad you are here. Uncle Dan!"

"Ay."

Gideon's eyes met his and glanced to Sarah.

"It was not her fault; don't let her ever think so."

"I hear, lad."

"Dear old boys, sitting side by side," he went on playfully. "Look at them, Sarah; friends of a lifetime. How awfully good they have been to you and me!"

Sarah never spoke. It seemed to her absolutely impossible that Gideon was going to die. If he did, of course Uncle Dan would die too, and very likely Uncle Dol. She knelt on beside the bed in dumb misery, watching now the face of one uncle, now of the other.

"I am tired. It must be your dinner-time. Go down and come back again by-and-by," said Gideon, presently, in a faint voice. "You stay, Sarah."

By degrees they left the room. Dan Thornborough was the last to go. Gideon called him back.

"Uncle Dan! Give my love to Aunt Rachel. I know she would have come if it had not been for her bronchitis. I say, would you mind just giving me a kiss? You used to when I was a little chap, you know."

Dan Thornborough stooped and kissed him.

"The crown is fallen from our heads," he said in a voice that trembled.

"Uncle, oh *don't*, Uncle Dan!" wailed Sarah, suddenly clutching hold of him.

"Ay, Sarah, I have not forgotten you. We must try and comfort each other."

Then he laid his hand on his nephew's head, stooped, kissed him once more, and left them.

Sarah knelt on.

"Tell me, darling," whispered Gideon—"I have meant to ask you for so long—could you have loved me if I had lived? You know now what I meant when I showed you the Bible verse about Jacob loving Rachel, don't you?"

"Oh yes, Gideon dear. But I don't know about marrying you. I only know how sorry I am I spoke so unkindly to you."

"Never mind, dear. That does not matter now, nor does my question either. I think you would have loved me," he said wistfully.

"Yes, I think I should; you have always been my ideal, Gideon. Oh, how cruel and wicked it is that you are dying!"

A shadow flitted across his beautiful young face.

"Kiss me once, just once," he said faintly.

She did so ; then he lay still, holding her hand. Again his eyes closed. Scalding tears filled Sarah's eyes, and fell unheeded on to the counterpane. She made no movement, fearing to disturb her cousin.

By-and-by Dan Thornborough, followed by Young George, came softly in. He advanced to the bed, stood looking for a moment, then led Sarah away.

That was the last she saw of Gideon Leigh. His father watched by him all night, and he died in his arms.

CHAPTER II.

"It's no use talking, Jacob ; I tell you Miss Sarah don't feel his death, not anything to speak of like what her uncles do and the mistress, not to speak of you and me."

The speaker was Mrs. Frant. Her brother had "stepped up" to the house to inquire after her in a bad fit of rheumatism, and they sat together in her special sanctum, a small room off the great oak-ceiled kitchen.

"She is but a young maid ; sorrow is new to her," he replied, busying himself with a new foot he was fastening on to his sister's workbox.

"Young ! That is always your excuse for her. Eighteen is of course young to eighty, which I shall be on my next birthday, if I live. What do you say ? Sarah is twenty.

Of course I know that, considering I held her father at his christening. Our mother was to have held him, when on the very morning what does she do but sprain her ankle, so the old missis says to me, 'Pop on your bonnet, Jane, and come to church, for nobody but a Frant shall help in the christenings.'"

"Ay," returned her brother, "I was a little chap, but I remember. It was the day of the thunderstorm, when the oak was struck that the old master set such store by. Gideon did not favour him. He favoured the master most. Poor lad! Whose turn will come next?"

"Yours, Jacob, likely enough. You are a main wiry man for your years, but you have reached your threescore years and ten, so you can't complain that it's against Scripture if you're took next."

"Or you?" he returned with grim humour.

"I hope I know my duty better than to complain, whatever time I'm took, though so long as Sarah don't outgrow them almond cakes, and the mistress has pikelets hot for

tea on a sabbath, I trust I may be spared. I've tried all this while to teach that girl of Polly's—for the mistress says she shall take the place after me—but there, you make 'em light, as I tell her, and they are a pleasure to look at; you make 'em heavy, and they lie that stony on your chest that you wish you had never been born."

"Ay," returned her brother, "there is a good deal in cooking; 'tis the one thing in which the weaker vessel is stronger than us."

Mrs. Frant sniffed, and changed the subject.

"I don't think the mistress ought to be quite so hard on Sarah, supposing the child did have a few words with Gideon, though I never heard what they was over, did you, Jacob?"

"Nay. But the mistress is breaking her heart for the lad. She'll go next, mark my words."

"*What!* Miss Rachel?" cried his sister.

He nodded.

"It's four months ago since Gideon died, and she has not left her room. You tell me

it's bronchitis? It's not; it's heart-break. The Lord has stricken her sore."

"Well, now, you was always shrewd. Take you as boy, or take you as man, I never knew a shrewder. Fancy Miss Rachel going before me after all! Dear heart, just fancy!"

Jacob had finished the workbox; he got up and said—

"It won't do to anger Sarah—we must be patient with her; the Lord is trying her sorely, and she is setting herself up against Him. There is more to come. His judgments are swift; He trieth the very hearts and reins."

Mrs. Frant bowed her head. Nobody at Meads ever doubted that what Jacob Frant said would come true, and of late years he had spoken more in a prophetic strain than ever.

"How do you know there's more to come, Jacob?" she asked in an awed voice.

"How do I know when the rain is coming? When on a still day the air gives a shiver.

'Doth the wild ass bray when he hath grass?
Or loweth the ox over his fodder?
Can the rush grow up without mire?
Can the flag grow without water?'

If we would know His meaning we must watch His judgments continually. There is a new master coming to Meads, else why is Gideon taken? A creaking gate will hang a long time. 'Tis your new timber that shrinks. Sarah is as new wood, she must be seasoned; she must be tried in the fire, even as gold is tried. There is death in the air, but after it a season of clear shining."

"I'm main sure there can't be much 'clear shining' for us if the master is to go, Jacob. It do set my teeth on edge to hear you talk sometimes," complained his sister, as she stirred her fire, and drew her shawl closer round her portly shoulders.

"The old tale, 'Prophecy unto us *smooth* things,'" he returned grimly; "the women are all alike."

"They are!" she retorted. "All of 'em has too much patience with the men-folk. Considering your age, it do look unseemly of you not to give over saying things against the intelligence of them as had patience with you when you was no bigger than a lamb, and a deal more trouble, as I can vouch for."

“ Well, well, Jane, I’m not saying but that females have their proper place in creation, and ’tis ill having words with those you have to bide with. Two sparrows upon one ear of corn don’t agree long. I’d best be going. You have been a right good sister to me, and a right good servant to Meads. Tell Sarah there’s fourteen chickens out to-day—that old Cochin hen has sat well—and I’ve got a basket of ducklings lying afore my fire in flannel. She had best step up and look at them this afternoon, it will make a reason for her leaving the mistress’ room a bit.”

“ She’s been sitting a deal too much indoors lately ; it’s bad for the liver, and makes you look all on the dark side of things. I’ll tell her. There’s the calves now, Jacob—I might mention them ; Sarah’s always taken a deal of interest in the bringing up of calves.”

“ Ay, and there’s the litter of black pigs ; a picture they are, too. I was showing them to the master only yesterday ; and all he said was, ‘ ’Tis two years to-day since Gideon and Sarah came home from abroad, Jacob.’ ”

"Did he, now? You don't say so! A powerful one for dates, the master always was. Never forgotten to wish me health not once on my birthday ever since I've been head in the kitchen. Going, Jacob? Well, the workbox is done beautifully. I'll see if I can't persuade Sarah to go up to your house this afternoon," she called after him.

The Frants were right; Sarah Thornborough was experiencing a new sensation, that of being unpopular.

Nothing would persuade Miss Thornborough that her niece had not been the cause of Gideon's death. This view she had dolorously supported to the many friends who came to discuss the event or to condole with her.

Sir Godolphin Leigh said little, which forbearance was due to his regard for his brother-in-law, and for what he knew Gideon would have wished. Sarah missed his blustering praise and blame, and was more wounded by his silence than by the outspoken remarks of other people. It began to be the

version in the neighbourhood that young Miss Thornborough of Meads had a very ungovernable temper, so much so that her cousin had left the house after a storm of abuse, and had ridden Flash recklessly away and met his end.

Miss Thornborough had grown irritable and tearful. Her bronchitis had tried her, and the death of Gideon had taken from her the one being she really loved. She had grown to be proud of Sarah, but to feast her eyes on her nephew had been the joy of her heart.

“Put some more coal on the fire and read me the death of Absalom,” she said to her niece on the day of the conversation between the Frants below stairs.

Sarah obeyed.

“Oh, Gideon, my boy, would God I had died for thee! ‘I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me,’” she repeated, wiping her eyes with her dainty lace-bordered handkerchief. “Where have you put his packet of letters, the ones he wrote from abroad?”

“Here they are,” said Sarah, placing them in her aunt’s thin mitten-covered hands.

“He wrote every week. It was a great pleasure to me.”

“I am sorry I did not write oftener, Aunt Rachel ; I never thought of it,” said Sarah, contritely.

“No, I dare say not. Young people are always giddy.”

“Gideon was young too.”

“True, my dear, but he was an exception. It is a terrible thing to have hurried a fellow-creature to his end, Sarah ; I trust you ask the Lord’s pardon continually.”

Sarah’s face set itself into stubborn lines, she answered nothing. Her aunt closed her eyes and leaned back in the great white dimity chair.

“Will you be good enough to read to me the fifty-first Psalm ?” she asked faintly.

Sarah took up her aunt’s well-studied Bible and read the Psalm all through in as hard tones as her sweet voice was capable of taking.

“ ‘Thou desirest not sacrifice ; else would

I give it: . . . a broken and a contrite heart . . . Thou wilt not despise,'” repeated Miss Thornborough, in a weak voice. “‘A broken and a contrite heart,’ do you hear, Sarah?”

“Yes, I hear.”

“It will be no use your going on doing your duty all day to your uncle, and fulfilling your obligations towards all our friends and neighbours, and towards our servants and dependents, unless you have a broken and contrite heart to offer. Do you understand?”

“I hear what you say, Aunt Rachel.”

“Ah, child, when will you learn?” sighed her aunt.

“I don’t know,” said Sarah, miserably. “Do you suppose there is much more for me to learn?”

“Yes, I fear so, and there will be no one to speak the truth to you, when I am gone.”

Sarah started, then suddenly sat down on a stool at her aunt’s feet and stared up in her face.

“Why, you don’t mean to say you are going to die, *too*?” she demanded.

“I hope so, child, I am sure. I do not

care about living now Gideon is gone. It would have been different if he had married and there had been children about the place again. There is nothing for me to live for now. You will take care of your uncle."

A pause followed, as though Miss Thornborough had expected some remark. Then she went on again—

"You see, child, it does not even occur to you to say you are sorry I am dying. And yet I have done all I could for you all these years."

"Oh, Aunt Rachel, I am a *mass* of sorrow. I miss Gideon every day more and more. I have not got any words," cried Sarah, wretchedly.

"I wish you had, my dear; it would be more comforting to me if you spoke sometimes. How else can I know what you think?"

"I *can't* talk," declared Sarah, desperately. "Everything seems like an awful black cloud. I think God is cruel, and I envy you dying."

"Vain words, and sinful, and unbecom-

ting a Christian gentlewoman. We Thornboroughs have always been headstrong, but never rebellious or irreverent."

"Perhaps I shan't be so all my life, then ; you always say I am a true Thornborough."

Presently her aunt began in another strain.

"There are those dozen fine damask tablecloths, you would have had all of them if you had married. I think I shall send Mabel six of them ; they give a great many dinner-parties now, since her grandmother died. The six with the ivy-leaf pattern, I mean."

Her niece nodded.

"Then there is the old Chelsea service. I shall give that to Fred. It would be a pity to divide it. Your aunt Jael, Gideon's mother, gave it to me. I meant him to have it. It came from the Leigh side of the family. It ought to go to Fred. Just fetch me the scarlet leather case out of the top shelf in my wardrobe. No, ring for Susan ; she can find it."

"I can get it, Aunt Rachel."

"I wish, my dear, you would let me think for myself sometimes ; I am not quite helpless yet."

So Susan Frant came and fetched the case, and gave her mistress her medicine and retired again.

"Poor girl! she felt the desertion of that lover of hers keenly," remarked Miss Thornborough, as she tried with trembling fingers to undo the case.

"That horrid young gardener, you mean! I don't believe Susan will ever marry now. She says she shall always stay with us."

"With you, you mean, child," corrected her aunt. "See here, I am going to give these rubies to Mabel. She is dark; they would not suit you. Jewels are not highly spoken of by St. Paul, but neither must we waste those good things which God has given us. These pearls you may have."

"Oh, Aunt Rachel, what lovely things! But I wish you would not give me presents when you are displeased with me. It makes me feel so uncomfortable."

A tap came at the door, and Dan Thornborough entered. He saw at a glance what was going on.

"I am giving her and Mabel my own

ornaments, Dan ; the family things you will see to. Are you disposed to read to me a chapter from the 'Holy Living and Dying,' the work of that godly man, Bishop Taylor?"

Her brother made no reply, but merely pointed to the book. Sarah handed it to him. It had lain on the table by her aunt's bedside ever since she could remember. Then, sitting down again on the low stool, she ventured to take one of her aunt's wrinkled hands in hers. It was gently withdrawn, so Sarah clasped her hands round her own knees instead, and stared gloomily into the fire. Her uncle drew a chair close up to his sister, and began his reading. The red case of ornaments lay in Miss Thornborough's lap ; the rays from the afternoon sun danced on them through the west window, and on the gold of Sarah's hair, and on the silver heads of her uncle and aunt.

Dan Thornborough turned over the leaves, reading portions at intervals.

"'. . . Lord, when it shall please Thee

that her (his) soul goes out of the prison of her (his) body, it may be received by angels and preserved from the surprise of evil spirits, and from the horrors and amaze-ments of new and strange regions, and be laid up in the bosom of our Lord.'

" 'Of Anger. Use all reasonable discourses to excuse the faults of others, considering that there are many circumstances of time, of person, of accident, of inadvertency, of infrequency, of aptness to amend, of sorrow for doing it ; and it is well that we take any good in exchange for the evil done or suffered.' "

When he had finished, none of them spoke for a few minutes ; then Miss Thornborough said—

" It is written, ' Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.' My sun is setting, it may be that I have been over-wrath with you, Sarah. You are young, you have had a lesson, it may please the Lord to curb your hasty tongue and to bend you to His will. I forgive you. Give me a kiss."

Sarah obeyed, then lingered.

"Aunt Rachel, I would give anything in the world if I were good like you."

But her aunt had closed her eyes, and her uncle rose to lower the blind, for the sun's rays were full on her. Then he returned to his seat by his sister, and began to put back the ornaments.

"Send Susan with your aunt's tea, she looks over-tired," he said.

So Sarah with a heavy heart went downstairs, pondering whether her uncle had chosen the passage on anger as a lesson to her or to her aunt, or only by chance. She felt as miserable as when she was a child and had pulled off the clematis in a rage in Jacob's cottage. Yet she knew that her uncle understood her; but since Gideon's death he had devoted a great deal of time to his sister, and she began to see now that it was because he knew they would soon be parted.

The days were growing long now, but the weather was very cold. She went down to the drawing-room, where the tea was placed ready. It was very cheerless, the fire did

not seem to warm the room, and a bleak north wind was blowing outside against the struggling buds and blossoms. Some visitors were announced, and Sarah had to rouse herself to entertain them. One was a girl of her own age, who, while her mother went up to see Miss Thornborough, sat and chattered to Sarah about her own approaching marriage. She listened politely and tried to be interested, but was thinking all the time, "I wonder if she knows anything about funerals, or what it feels like when people give away their ornaments to you because they are going to die, or if she generally comes straight down from prayers to afternoon tea like I have been doing for ever so many weeks now."

When the visitors had left, Susan came to tell her that Jacob Frant had left word he wanted to see her, so, as her uncle still remained upstairs, she put on her hat and went forlornly across the fields in the blustering wind, and sought comfort in the contemplation of the young life among the animals.

By the time the north winds had ceased, and the spring flowers were giving place to the summer ones, the stern, upright spirit of Rachel Thornborough had passed away. The week after she was buried Mrs. Frant followed her.

The two great women factors being gone, Miss Thornborough, as Sarah soon found herself beginning to be styled, discovered that ever-increasing demands were made upon her time.

Mary, "that girl of Polly's," was a staid, sensible young woman of five and twenty, and, having been for years well drilled by her autocratic great-aunt in all duties belonging to the kitchen, she proceeded to follow in her steps, with much devotion to her young mistress. Sarah took counsel with Susan Frant about the stores of linen, china, and those miscellaneous articles in wardrobes and cupboards which only accumulate in an old family which has dwelt for years in one house. With her rested the disposal of all her aunt's private property; it was with a sense of awe that she found herself mistress

of so much, and she began to look back with a feeling of remorse that she had not better understood the methodical mind of her aunt, that it had never occurred to her to be interested in this more especially womanly side of the great household of which she was now one of the heads.

“What is all this box of old yellow lace kept for, do you suppose?” she asked, when she was overlooking chests and wardrobes.

“It is very old lace, Miss Sarah. That piece you have in your hand has been the christening robe in your family for generations. Master Gideon was the last to wear it: the mistress told me she lent it to Miss Jael; and that veil is the finest old Brussels: the mistress sent it up for Mrs. Meakin to be married in. She was keeping it for you next.”

Sarah sighed.

“Why didn’t she ever show me these things herself, Susan?”

“I don’t know, my dear. You were always out and about the place with the master. She said to me one day that she

thought you did not care for old things. One day when I were helping her lay them all in fresh tissue-paper, Master Gideon came up in his riding-boots and sat here knocking about with his whip ; he was looking for you. The mistress showed him that veil, and told him she hoped you would wear it next, and he give her such a kiss, and said, ‘ You are a trump, Aunt Rachel ; I don’t believe there was ever such a housewife.’ And I don’t believe there ever was, my dear.”

Sarah unlocked, and dived into another drawer, and from its depths said, in a choking voice—

“ Don’t tell me any more of these tales, Susan. I’ve been a selfish, inconsiderate pig to Aunt Rachel. No wonder she was fondest of Gideon. Look here, did she want this flowered brocade for anything special ? Do you know whose it was ? ”

Susan considered a minute.

“ Let me see. Why, it must be one of the dress pieces your grandmamma gave her when she was going to be married. She told me she kept all the things locked

in that drawer, just as when she had them. I never saw them. She told me one day when she found me crying about my own affairs, you know, my dear." And Susan winked away a few tears, as her young mistress spread the rich material out on the enormous four-post bed.

Lavender fell from between the folds in little showers on to the carpet.

"Get out the rest, Susan ; I want to see them all."

Susan obeyed.

"Oh, my dear, look at this pale blue satin with the bunches of roses tied with love-knots ; they don't make such stuffs now. Poor dear ! And to think it has all been put away for more than forty years ! Oh dear, oh dear !"

"Spread it all out ; put that yellow silk damask over that chair, and the puce poplin nearer the window. All Aunt Rachel's young life shut up in that wardrobe, all grand-mamma's plannings and choosings spread out here for me to handle and stare at—I, who had no existence then. Who would

have thought Aunt Rachel was so full of sentiment? Why did she never tell me?"

And Sarah Thornborough in her black dress sat sadly down among the gorgeous gleaming materials, and, clasping her hands idly in her lap, looked wistfully into the honest face of her nurse, and demanded again—

"Tell me, Susan, how is it she told you and never told me?"

Susan began to refold the blue satin carefully.

"You would not have understood," she said.

"Do children always misunderstand grown-up people, Susan?"

"Generally, my dear."

"Do they mind not being understood?"

"Some mind very much, others don't expect it. You see, Miss Sarah, that is why the affection of grown folks for children is the most unselfish sort of love there is. They know the children won't give them anything back, perhaps not for years and years; not then, very likely."

“ Don’t you think I give Uncle Dan back anything, Susan ? ”

“ Yes, you see you have always run about with him, so you have got to understand his ways. But the older you grow the more things you will find out, even in the master, that you never knew before, and that you couldn’t understand if you *had* known.”

Sarah’s thoughts went sorrowfully back, as they had done many a time already, to her uncle’s revelation of his early life to herself and Gideon, also to his remarks about Mr. Gray of Gray’s Wick.

“ I don’t think being grown up is half as nice as being a child,” she said.

Susan Frant brushed aside her tears in time to prevent their falling upon the yellow damask she was now folding up, and replied—

“ We all of us come to that conclusion as we get on in life, my dear.” Then, seeing that Sarah was staring hopelessly and forlornly out of the window, she added, “ But we don’t stop at it ; we find presently there are still many nice things to see and

to do, and we see the reasons for things better. Don't you get down-hearted, Miss Sarah."

Miss Thornborough's gaze travelled back from the window and rested on Susan's face.

"Why, you are crying! Don't cry, Susan dear. I wonder if you are thinking of that horrid young gardener!"

"Of course I am," declared Susan Frant, through her tears.

"I forgot all about him till Aunt Rachel said she was afraid he had been a great trouble to you."

"Just like the mistress; she was always so kind."

"Why *do* you go on grieving, Susan? There's you, and there is Uncle Dan—— Oh, I forgot. Perhaps you never knew about him?"

"Yes, I did, but it would not have been respectful in us to talk, you know."

"Well, there is you, and Uncle Dan, and Aunt Rachel, all setting their deepest thoughts on people they could never marry. And then look at dear, dear Gideon caring so about me. You heard, I dare say, Susan?"

"Yes, my dear, I always knew."

"I wish I understood," said Miss Thornborough, rising. "I wonder if I ever shall. You have known me since I was a little scrap of a thing, do you think I shall ever love anybody like that? Really be wrapped up in them. I should not care to feel anything less, of course."

"Ask Uncle Jacob, Miss Sarah; he has a wonderful way of telling you things. Why don't you ask him?"

"But what do *you* think, Susan?" her young mistress persisted.

"I think it's more likely that you'll come across some one who will feel like that towards you, than that you will feel so to them, that's what I think."

Sarah smiled for the first time that day.

"I should not like that," she said quietly; "those feelings ought to be equal, I should think. I can't look over anything more to-day. If Uncle Dan approves, I shall send some of that material to Mabel. Put it all away again. I shall want you to go into the town for me, by-and-by. Young George

can drive you. Come to me for the list when you are ready."

Things went on very quietly at Meads for many months after the death of Rachel Thornborough. The summer was a wet and chilly one. The Leighs went abroad in order that Sir Godolphin might take the waters again. Fred joined them in his holidays, for at any rate he served as a tireless listener to the perpetual recounting of Gideon's perfections, and was winning way with his father by his sturdy common sense. Mr. Gray sold Gray's Wick, and went abroad. Janion, the great confectioner, bought it, and settled there, as Dan Thornborough had foretold. They gave ceaseless entertainments, but, owing to their mourning, Sarah and her uncle had not called yet. Mrs. Meakin had another son, and the precocious twins were sent daily to school.

In the autumn, Sarah persuaded her uncle to take her to Scotland. The Rector and his daughter joined them, and the expedition proved a welcome change to Dan Thornborough, for his sister had disliked travelling,

and it had become a habit of years for her brother to remain at home with her.

Though they never mentioned it, both uncle and niece dreaded spending the first anniversary of Gideon's death alone together at Meads, and on their way back they accepted the oft-repeated invitation of an old friend of Jasper Thornborough's, Sarah's father, to stay with him in Northumberland.

It was thus Christmas before they returned home again.

There were no rejoicings on Sarah's twenty-first birthday. She and her uncle had a long talk over money matters in his study, when he introduced her for the first time to the mysteries of shares and investments. Mr. Simpson, the family lawyer, came over to lunch, and was closeted with Dan Thornborough all the afternoon. Before he left, Sarah learned that the half of her father's money was now hers, an equivalent to her share having been given to Mabel on her marriage.

"It will bring you in about two hundred pounds a year," Mr. Simpson told her.

It seemed to Sarah a vast sum, but she made no remark, devoting all her attention to the technical points that were being explained to her.

In the evening, when they were sitting alone together in the drawing-room, her uncle laid down his book and watched her as she sat opposite to him, busy over sewing lace and bright ribbon.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Making a pinafore for my godson. I told Mabel I was going to try," she answered, laughing.

He smiled.

"Do you know what that two hundred a year is for, Sarah?"

"Yes, for me to live upon if I am ever left alone in the world," she replied gravely.

"And what do you suppose will become of my money, and of your Aunt Rachel's? My father left everything to me, after the legacies were paid to your father and to your aunts Rachel and Jael, do you understand?"

"Yes. You had the most. That was fair. You had to keep up Meads."

"True. The whole of it will come to you by-and-by. That five thousand which has been settled upon you to-day is merely your own private pin-money."

Sarah let the work drop in her lap and looked intently at him.

"Do you mean that Meads and all your money will be mine?"

"After my death, yes."

"I shan't want it. Two hundred a year will be quite enough for me to go away somewhere and be miserable on."

"Everything will be yours, Sarah. I am desirous that you should know this, in order that during the years we are left together, you may ask me every point you are in ignorance about, and make yourself mistress of all my affairs. I may be spared for many years yet, and we will not, if you please, refer to my death again, unless it be necessary. Time is already healing our sorrows. Your uncle Dol has written to me to ask you to ride over there to-morrow when I go. I am indeed glad that he has of his own accord at last asked to see you at Leigh Court."

"So am I. I love Uncle Dol dearly, and he *must* know that I adored Gideon, even though I had not loved him in that particular way."

"He knows, of course. It will be all right now."

"Why should he ever have misunderstood? You didn't."

"Nay, that I cannot tell you. He happens to be more hasty than I. And then I have never been able to be properly angry with you, you know," he added, with his most whimsical smile.

"You, darling? No. You only had to say, 'Oblige me, Sarah,' in your most kingly style, and I always caved in at once, and did your bidding, didn't I?" she cried, falling on her knees beside him, and stroking his cheek.

He kissed her smooth white forehead. "We have always understood each other," he said.

"*Rather!*" she declared heartily. Then, catching his smile, she amended, "Yes, we have. I do not often talk slang, do I, darling?"

"Not often. It is a poor habit, and in few cases is it more expressive than correct English. In you it would seem to me to be singularly out of place."

"Why so, darling?" she asked, rubbing her cheek against his shoulder.

"Because you come of a long line of plain-dealing persons, whose *Yea* has always been *Yea*, and their *Nay*, *Nay*. People who have always kept free from the idiosyncrasies of passing fashions, and from the standards set forth in transiently popular pamphlet or novel. The graver aspects of life cannot be duly considered by persons whose conversation and thoughts are tinged by every ephemeral craze they see or hear around them."

Sarah fetched a stool and sat down at his feet with her arms resting on his knees and her eyes gravely fixed upon his face.

"Uncle Dan!"

"Ay, child."

"I want to speak to you."

"Speak."

"It is about what you told me of Mr. Gray."

"Ay. I knew you would ask me some day," he said, sighing.

"If I had happened to want to marry him you would have forbidden me to do so?"

"Most assuredly I should."

"Will you explain to me all about it, please—all about the whole question? There is so much I do not understand."

Dan Thornborough was silent for some time. His niece waited; she knew that he was engaged in what Jacob Frant more openly called "taking counsel with the Lord," and that he would speak as soon as he was ready to do so.

The butler, a comparatively new importation from the Howards, came in to replenish the fire. He glanced with some curiosity at his silent master and mistress, piled on more logs, and went out again. It had long been his ambition to serve Mr. Thornborough of Meads, and no Frant could have been more devoted to the family than was Graves.

"Sarah," said her uncle at last, "you are not the first who has asked me to talk to them on these matters. They stir the thoughts in

youth of young men and of maids, as is appointed by our Creator. It is as fitting that you should take counsel with some older person you can trust, as it would be unfitting did you desire to obtain information from those younger in years than yourself, and whom you could not in reason expect to know more than you do. We are sent into this world that we may progress in Christian life. Christian life is not retaining ignorance of evil. 'Human innocence is, not to know evil. Christian saintliness is to know both evil and good, and prefer good.' I might have endeavoured to keep all knowledge of evil from you and Gideon ; it would not have been possible for very long, nor would it have been desirable. I do not regret that these thoughts have begun to trouble you any more than I regret 'the blossom when I see the fruit hardening in its place.' These are partly the words of a wise man now dead, but they serve our turn to-night. Your ignorance of evil is past. I might have locked up my library and forbidden you to see newspapers and have exercised a jealous

censorship over all you read. I preferred to bring you up as heirs together with me of the kingdom of God, of which this world and its men and women are the portion He at present desires us to be interested in. I had no right to keep any knowledge from you, only to see that it came to you when you were sufficiently grown to deal with it."

Sarah sat staring at him intently.

"I wonder if every girl and boy has some one like you to talk to," she said.

"It should be so, child. If we elders accustomed ourselves to converse with young people on all their interests, confidences of a deeper nature would become as natural between them when they grew older. We cannot suddenly assume the right to speak to each other of these matters, we must have been in the constant habit of exchanging thoughts on many another."

He paused.

"Go on, please," she urged.

Her uncle looked at her thoughtfully.

"You lead a lonely life, child, in some senses. I wish you had some woman friend

you could have talked to. You do not seem to have come across any one yet."

"I have you, Uncle Dan. I have always had you ; I have never felt lonely," she said, continuing to gaze in his face in a rapt manner, awaiting his next words as though he were a prophet.

"You want me to talk to you about many deep questions, Sarah—about why I should have forbidden you to marry Mr. Gray, for instance?"

She nodded.

"Yes. And about Mary Magdalene, please."

He bent forward and again kissed her.

"It seems right that I should speak," he said half to himself, sighing. "I think I understand you, child. I will do my best, and you must forgive me if I tell you anything that wounds your feelings."

"Whatever you tell me is sure to be what I ought to learn. 'There is a time to keep silence and a time to speak,' you always say. This is a time for you to speak, please," she said persuasively.

So Dan Thornborough spoke, and Sarah listened in admiring gratitude, for she saw that such speaking was not easy to him.

It was ten o'clock before their earnest conversation came to an end and they rose to go into the dining-room for prayers.

After a Psalm, Dan Thornborough read a short passage on 'The Duty of Parents to their Children.' Sarah's somewhat wandering thoughts were recalled by hearing the voice she so dearly loved, reading—

“‘Season their younger years with prudent and pious principles, make them in love with virtue, and make them habitually so before they come to choose and discern good from evil, that their choice may be with less difficulty and danger.

“‘For it is a great pity to heap up much wealth for our children, and not to take care concerning the children for whom we get it. It is as if a man should take more care about his shoe than about his foot.’”

Seven years passed peacefully by. Sarah Thornborough and her uncle went out a great deal. The temporary coolness, caused by

Gideon's death, between her and their neighbours disappeared by degrees ; people agreed that she had been "very young," and that "accidents would happen." She was much sought after, and her uncle took a new lease of life and went everywhere with her. The daughters of Sir Godolphin Leigh grew up, and began to be taken to town for the season by their lively mother. Fred Leigh had, to his father's open satisfaction, no ambitions. He took a poor degree, came home, and settled down to manage all that was left of the Leigh Court estate, squandered considerably more since the few months of Gideon's energetic reforms. The old Rector died ; the new one was a widower with a grown-up son, and the complication set in of both of them desiring to marry Sarah Thornborough, who did not desire to marry either of them.

The son was a busy London barrister, who took his refusal in a business-like style, returned to town, and shortly after married the daughter of a judge.

"He only wanted 'a furniture-wife,' as

Charles Lamb calls them," said Sarah, laughing, to her aunt Mary, who was trying to scold her for refusing him. "I have no doubt I should look well in a room, but I can do that just as well unmarried, you see, and Meads makes a much better background for me than his house could possibly have been."

The Rector applied to Dan Thornborough for Sarah, all ignorant of his son's doings. Nobody but Sarah and her uncle ever knew of this last episode, so after her refusal the Rectory and Meads continued to be as good friends as before.

It had become an established custom for the Meakins to come to Meads every summer. Their family of small children enlivened the old house, and Robin and May were growing less bumptious, for they were beginning to understand that on all country subjects they were profoundly ignorant. Dan Thornborough was kind to them, but not greatly interested in them.

"I never had but two children," he remarked to Jacob Frant, as the two old men

stood one day near the barn watching Sarah's godson Percy fruitlessly endeavouring to lift the cat. Neither of them moved to help the child.

"Gideon would have laid hold of the beast by the tail or the ear, and not minded a scratch; he would never have been conquered. But this new breed of Miss Mabel's is a poor stock," declared old Jacob. "Five of them, now," he continued. Then, resuming his tramping over the fields at his master's side, he began tentatively, "Captain Janion's been here often of late."

"Ay," returned the other.

"We must all die, and are as 'water spilled upon the ground.' 'Tis eight years ago, and she was but a young maid. Gideon would have been a fine man by now, but so is Captain Janion, by what I can see."

"Ay," returned Dan Thornborough again.

Struck by the feebleness of his voice, Jacob looked at him. He was very white.

"Take my arm," he ordered. "Yon is the broken gate I'm having mended, we can sit on the wood a bit."

They made their way to it, and sat down.

Dan Thornborough passed his hand across his brow.

"I was giddy," he said.

Jacob produced a flask with cordial. He poured some into a tin cup.

"Drink that," he ordered. His master obeyed, holding the cup in a shaking hand.

"'Tis main hot for you to be tramping over the fields at noon," Jacob resumed, when they had sat for awhile without speaking.

"You can do it, Jacob ; we are nearly of an age."

"There's a bullock and a race-horse. Do you expect the same sort of work from one as from the other ?"

His master smiled.

"I have always been a tough man," he said.

"And are a tough man still. It's tempting Providence to act as you do," grumbled Jacob. "Out o' nights with Sarah, too."

"Not often. Our dissipations are not often nightly ones."

"Then you've the Sessions to attend, and

a dinner here and there, and the accounts of that charity school, not to mention the Board o' Guardians. Paul wasn't a patch on you, even with his care of all the Churches!"

Dan Thornborough laughed.

"I could not do it all if I were not so ably seconded by you, Jacob. You have managed Meads quite as much as I have all these years. Then there is Sarah; she is really our right hand now, which is what I desired."

"I shall tell her to see more to you. You must sit for an hour after your meal at noon; 'tis ill getting up at once and working, either with your head or your legs."

"Not a word to Sarah, if you please, Jacob."

"Wherefore not? She is no mimzy miss to be scared, or a reed to break if you lean your hand on it," argued Jacob, stubbornly.

"I must desire you do not speak to Sarah," he repeated.

"Then will you promise me to give over coming out in the sun at noontide?"

“Ay, you autocratic man, I will be careful.”

They sat still awhile longer. Opposite, under the hedge, haymakers were resting and having their dinner. Smoke from the cottages of Polly and of Ben slowly ascended through the trees. Across three or four fields further the ivy-covered gables of Meads rose between the broad-spreading oaks and beeches. To the left, in the sloping field, sheep were feeding, and in the far distance, ruminating near the pond under the willows, was a group of the prized Alderney cows. The well-kept road wound up the slope, and here and there the sunlight gleamed on the oak paling. Near the gate leading into the top field, with its great barns, stood a team of horses; the brass ornaments on their harness glittered in the sun, the waggoner lay asleep by the roadside. The gaze of Dan Thornborough wandered over the whole, taking in every detail; it fell upon the grasshoppers leaping from blade to blade close in front of him, and upon ox-eyed daisies and red sorrel, waving on the edge

of the ditch. Jacob's latest companion, a shaggy sheep dog, lay curled at his feet.

"It is a fair world, a very fair world, and all of it, as far as the eye can reach, is mine," said Dan Thornborough, breaking the silence.

"Every foot of it, and more besides," acquiesced Jacob Frant, in a tone of satisfaction. "And a better-kept and a better-worked estate than ours you won't find in the whole country."

"Ben's second lad is a likely fellow, Jacob; you will make something of him, I fancy. I should like Ben's son to learn how to work the place. His mother was a Frant; he belongs to us, you see."

"He's a likely lad, take him all round. I've seen worse," allowed Jacob, "but 'tis a pity he is not a better scholar; he's all for looking after the live stock, but for casting an account he's as stupid as an owl after a good meal o' mice. Stares at you. I must get Sarah to take him in hand, he might do it for her."

"Ay," returned his master, gazing thought-

fully over the landscape. "Eighty years—child, boy, and man—have I dwelt here, and I shall go and see it no more. Well, I trust I leave no enemies behind, except that fellow Jones who was so angered at my letting Ben buy that bit of land. But I think Jones is beginning to see Ben has as much right to a bit of freehold as I, if he can pay for it."

"When a man's ways please the Lord He maketh his enemies, even a son of Belial, like Jones, to be at peace with him. Not that the Lord has had much trouble with enemies of yours, for, saving Jones, and one or two of his kidney, you never had any," returned Jacob.

After another long silence his master resumed—

"I think you made some allusion to Captain Janion before we sat down. I wish to say to you that I do not expect to live to see Sarah married."

"Why not? Is the maid going to be another ten years over it?"

"I do not know, but I do know that I shall not be here another ten years."

Jacob grunted.

"There's many a fool the Lord might take first," he grumbled. "He had best let well alone."

His master smiled.

"Why, Jacob, you are always preaching that we should bow to the will of the Almighty, now you are preaching against your own doctrines."

"Well," returned Jacob, in a depressed voice, "it's not common fairness to expect the door to hang after the hinges are gone ; and yet I can't say I'm resigned to the idea o' following you just yet. Moreover, Sarah would cut but a poor figure without one or other of us at her back."

"Ay, just so. Doubtless you will be therefore left when I am taken," said Dan Thornborough, rising very slowly from his rough seat.

Jacob Frant rose too, so did the dog, yawning and stretching himself. Jacob held out his arm again, Dan took it in silence, and they slowly began to cross the field in the sun. They neither of them spoke till they

neared the exit on to the cart road ; then Dan Thornborough turned to Jacob and, looking in his face affectionately, said—

“The real good-byes are not always said when eye looks into eye for the last time. Here, give me your hand. For many a long year you and I have pulled along together, many a pleasant hour we have passed together. I trust that I may be spared from causing trouble to others in my last hours. It is most likely that you will not then be with me, so, old friend, the fancy takes me to say ‘Good-bye’ now.”

Jacob wrung his master’s long thin hand between his large horny ones, and the two old men stood for a moment regarding each other. Then Dan Thornborough turned, and slowly, with bent head, and hands clasped behind him, took his way up the shady side of the road towards the house.

Jacob Frant remained. He lighted his pipe very deliberately, and, leaning his arms on the top of the gate, stood smoking for some time in silence. The noontide hour went by. The waggoner woke up and came

along the road with his team; he greeted Jacob as he passed, the old man did not notice him. The haymakers started work again in the field behind him; one came on a message to him.

"Let be," he answered gruffly, without turning round.

"What ails Mr. Frant?" they said.

He smoked his pipe out. Mechanically he lighted another. Polly's youngest girl came after him—

"Grandfather, mother says your dinner is cold."

"Let be," he answered again; "I want none." And the child went away.

Presently a tear fell from his eyes to the dusty ground. He brushed the back of his hand over his face, roused himself, and, leaning on his stout ash stick, he walked away up the road and into the top field towards his own cottage. "Ichabod!" he said to himself, with a heavy sigh.

One day, before the Meakins left, Sir Godolphin Leigh and his wife came over to lunch. Afterwards, Mabel Meakin walked

on the terrace, discussing Sarah with Lady Leigh.

"I wish she would marry Captain Janion, and have done with all this uncertainty," she said.

"My dear Mabel, we should not like her to marry into a family connected so closely with trade," expostulated Lady Leigh.

"It won't do to go on objecting to everybody; Sarah is nearly twenty-nine."

"And if she were forty-nine it would not make any difference," said Lady Leigh, laughing. "Certainly Captain Janion is the only man since poor Gideon died that your uncle Dan has considered at all suitable. Sir Godolphin won't hear of it, of course. I should have to talk him over."

"Sarah doesn't care a bit for him; she sees, hears, and thinks of nothing in the world but Uncle Dan. It has always been the same."

"She is a fine creature. Look at her now, swinging the children under the copper beech up there. There is something rare about Sarah, though she is not strictly beautiful. She is distinctly the great lady, a

very fitting head for a great place like this. I am most interested to see who she will marry."

"Nobody, very likely."

"My dear Mabel, what a preposterous idea! It is her duty to do so. Of course she will."

Mrs. Meakin smiled placidly.

"We shall see. Do you not think Uncle Dan is getting to look very feeble?"

"No, I have not noticed it. Sir Godolphin was saying the other day, when he rode over to us, that, for a man of his years, he never saw such a seat as he still has. He is a splendid old man. Of course he will leave your children something handsome."

"I hope so. Yes, he is sure to do so. Uncle Dan has always been most generous to Percy and me. Oh dear, Sarah has taken baby from nurse! I must go to her, that is the one thing Sarah knows nothing about. Excuse me, Aunt Mary. Sarah! Sarah, please give back baby!" she cried, hastening away down the terrace steps.

Lady Leigh stood and waited till Sarah,

having delivered up her niece, came towards her.

“Mabel is in a grand fuss,” she declared. “She is like an anxious old hen if you touch one of her chicks. If I can manage lambs and calves and ducks and chicks, why not babies?”

“It is the human mother you can’t manage, not the baby,” declared Lady Leigh, laughing.

“Yes,” said Sarah, “I suppose that is it.”

Late on in the autumn, when all their visitors had left, Dan Thornborough and his niece were also taking a turn on the terrace. It was a mild afternoon; all the trees were turning to burnished gold, and the air was so still that they could hear an occasional acorn fall on to the gravel, and the rustle of a squirrel who was amusing himself in and out among the branches of the great oak at one end of the terrace. Tits were silently running up and down the bark of the Scotch firs.

Sarah said suddenly to her uncle—

“I wonder if it is likely that I shall ever

see again that man who wandered through that Spanish town with us ten years ago?"

"What man?" he asked, putting his arm through hers.

She explained. Then he said—

"All things are possible, but it is not very likely. Do you wish to meet him?"

"Yes, I must say I do," she replied frankly, "only you see he was in business, and since the Janions settled here I seem to have heard so many theories against the social position of business men. And yet the only two I have met I like better than any others."

"I did not know Captain Janion was in business," said her uncle, with a smile.

"Darling, you know what I mean; his people were, at any rate."

Dan Thornborough stopped, and stared at his niece.

"Surely, Sarah, it is not possible that you have been thinking of a man with whom, as a mere child, you passed a few chance hours ten years ago, and whose name you do not even know?"

"It sounds funny, doesn't it?" she cried teasingly. "*Of course* I've not been thinking about him, except now and then lately some words of his have come across my mind. He said sorrow was part of our training, and that it was better to try to face it and be strong than to be angry at it. I did not understand then, but I do now. I think he must have been a strong man who had had trouble."

"What did Percy and Mabel think of him?"

"Don't know, darling. Did not ask. We all forgot about him directly. Except that I remember he gave my hand rather a shake, and said he hoped I should stop just as I was; so I suppose he approved of me."

"You never told me all this, Sarah."

"No, I forgot. He must have thought me rather queer. I remember I asked him if he was not lonely travelling without his wife, and he said he hadn't got one."

Her uncle laughed.

"That is just the sort of thing you used to do, child. Well, no doubt he has got a

wife long ago, if he is worth anything. Clever, you said?"

"I suppose so. He was much more of a guide-book than Percy, and ever so much more interesting, and he seemed to understand several languages. I told you all about that."

"Yes, I remember now. It grows chilly; let us go in, Sarah."

"Then you would not be angry if I married a man in business?" she demanded.

"Marry whom you like, dear. You are not likely to go wrong. You will probably choose better for yourself than I could choose for you—now."

"He would like me to marry Captain Janion, I do believe," thought Sarah. "Naughty old man, I will *make* him speak."

She stood in the doorway when they reached it and blocked the entrance.

"You shan't come in till you tell me whether or not you want me to become Mrs. Janion," she cried, putting her face close to his.

He stood leaning on his stick and looking into her laughing face.

"Domineering, inquisitive child, I do want it," he said, smiling.

"I don't think the name of Janion-Thornborough would sound well," she said, putting her arm gently over his shoulder and kissing him. Then she drew him within. "Come in, darling; there is a nice little fire and you must sit by it—your hands are quite cold."

He submitted while she fetched him his slippers, helped him off with his coat, and made him sit down in his armchair close to the fire.

"Janion will be a most thrice-blessed man," he said. Then, taking her face between his hands, he regarded her lovingly, and repeated with a smile—

" 'Gay hair, more gay than straw where harvest lies;
Lips red and plum, as cherries' ruddy side;
Eyes fair and great, like fair, great ox's eyes.' "

"Flatterer!" she cried, kissing him delightedly.

Then he settled himself comfortably and

began to doze. Sarah went softly to the window, and stood there a long time watching the sun setting behind the golden beeches.

A few days later she was waiting for her uncle to come to her as usual in the drawing-room before dinner. It was a stormy evening, and the rain was blowing in sheets against the window-panes. The firelight danced upon her shining evening dress and on the rings on her hands, clasped loosely in front of her, as she gazed at the blue flame leaping from the logs. Graves opened the door and looked in.

"The master has not come in yet, miss," he said.

Sarah turned round sharply.

"Not come in? Why, it is nearly dinner-time! How very wrong of Old George to keep him talking so long in the stables! Do run over, Graves, and tell your master I want to speak to him at once."

Graves returned in a few minutes.

"George says the master left him nearly two hours ago. He went out by the lower yard door."

“Oh dear! Then no doubt he meant to have a little walk in the avenue before coming in. But it has come on to rain since, Graves. Where can he be?”

“Perhaps he has turned into the Lodge, out of the wet, miss.”

“Yes, very possibly. Just tell Young George to go and see. Make haste!”

Sarah uneasily wandered into her uncle's room. The coat and hat he had in daily use were missing, also a rough old plaid which of late she had made him wind round him if he were going out at night. She wandered out again, across the stone hall, glancing at the old clock, which marked the hour of eight. She paused a moment to look at the heron, a new acquisition which Jacob had captured and stuffed and presented to her. It was now fixed up opposite to the spoonbill of her childish memories. She went to the hall door and looked out; the rain was pattering on the porch steps, and the wind had dragged down the creepers—they hung torn and broken round the pillars. A gust of wind blew the

rain against her dress. She shut the door and came in.

“No sound of him coming up the drive ; where *can* he be ? ” she said to herself.

Too anxious to sit still she wandered upstairs to speak to Susan Frant in the workroom.

Passing the door of her uncle’s bedroom—that state-room of Meads, occupied always by the head of the house—she glanced in, to make sure that his fire was bright, and that all was placed ready for him. Her glance fell upon the great four-post bed ; she started, for there lay her uncle, wrapped in his great-coat, just as he must have come in.

“Uncle Dan, dear, you are ill. Oh, why didn’t you ring ? ” she cried, flying towards him.

But Dan Thornborough took no notice of his niece ; he lay with his face on the pillow resting on the palm of his hand. Then Sarah stood still and looked at him, and remained standing, stiff, silent, and cold, her heart turned to stone. Graves and Susan, searching for her and for their master,

presently found them thus together, Sarah's face as white, set, and immovable as her uncle's, nor did she stir or speak when the household came pouring into the still chamber.

Messengers went riding in haste to Dr. Leslie and to Leigh Court. Sir Godolphin Leigh and his wife came at once, and Dr. Leslie arrived soon after them.

Upstairs they found Sarah still by her uncle's bed, only that Susan had pushed a chair behind her, and she had mechanically sat down.

"Sally," said Uncle Dol, tremulously, touching her arm. But she took no notice. The old man looked on the peaceful face of his brother-in-law and said, as tears, which he made no attempt to conceal, rolled from his eyes, "Why, Dan! Gone? Eh? What?"

Lady Leigh spoke gently—

"Come away with me, Sarah dear."

But Sarah took no heed.

"Oh, Sally, Sally, my dear, you can't stay here!" cried Uncle Dol, in a heart-broken voice.

Then Sarah uttered a terrible sound, like some noble animal wounded to death, and fell forward on to the bed with her arms spread over her uncle's body.

It was soon known all over the neighbourhood that Mr. Thornborough of Meads was dead, and that Miss Thornborough had not recovered from the shock, but was lying in a dangerous state at Meads, with a trained nurse sent by Dr. Leslie to help Susan Frant to nurse her. Sir Godolphin Leigh remained at Meads. The nurse was brought to him on her arrival.

“My niece has never been ill in her life ; you must pull her through, do you hear ? God bless my soul, she is owner of all this property and the apple of my eye ! Complain to me if you have any complaints, but you won't have any. We are all in great trouble here, as Dr. Leslie may have told you.”

“Yes, he has explained everything ; I am so sorry for you all.”

“Good fellow, good fellow. Eh ? What ? God bless me, you look a bit of a thing to

come nursing! No more strength than a sparrow!"

"I am strong," she said, smiling.

"Well, well, be off to my niece. You must pull her through, mind! What are we to call you?"

"Call me 'Nurse,' if you please. My name is Jessie Hay."

PART V.

THE HOME OF EDWARD HAY.

“ His every sense had grown
Ethereal for pleasure ; 'bove his head
Flew a delight half-graspable ; his tread
Was Hesperian ; to his capable ears
Silence was music from the holy spheres ;
A dewy luxury was in his eyes ;
The little flowers felt his pleasant sighs
And stirr'd them faintly.

. . . O my love,
My breath of life, where art thou ?
. . . Where'er thou art,
Methinks it now is at my will to start
Into thine arms.”

CHAPTER I.

“EACH man is a new soul in this world ; untried, with a boundless Possible before him. No one can prescribe his duties, or mark out his obligations. Each man’s temptations are made up of a host of peculiarities, internal and external, which no other mind can measure. You are tried alone—alone you bear and conquer, alone you must be sifted by the world. What a man can do in conjunction with others does not test a man. Tell us what he can do alone. . . . There is a false humility which says, ‘It is my own poor thought and I must not trust it.’ Do not be unnaturally humble. The thought of your mind perchance is the Thought of God.”

Edward Hay sat reading this to himself over his late breakfast one foggy Sunday

morning in November. He was in London lodgings. Two years had passed since, following close on his refusal by Flora Moore, his mother had died. He had then divided the slender family possessions between his sisters, and after seeing Augusta duly married to Herbert Moore, and Jessie settled in a hospital to train as a nurse, he gave up Byron Villa and took a lodging in London. He was leading two lives. In all that concerned his business, in which he was now a partner, he was keenly interested, energetic, and enterprising; in all that concerned his intellectual, social, and domestic life he was frozen and apathetic. He was as omnivorous a reader as ever, but what he read no longer interested him beyond the moment. He paid the few calls he ever made solely out of duty. Philanthropy he abhorred, pessimism he despised, enthusiasms he envied. When the aim for which he had worked and saved for ten years had come suddenly to an end, all his ideals had come to an end too. There stretched before his mental vision the long or short series of

years which go to make up a human life, respectable, probably wealthy, but dull beyond all conception.

In this state of mind he had now lived decorously, amiably, and—outwardly, at any rate—successfully, for many months past.

There were plenty of things to do on this Sunday, but he did not want to do any of them. He could run down in time for lunch with his sister Ada, and have a chat with lively Tom King. Or he could meet a couple of friends who were going up the river ; the weather would probably be fine out of town, and they were expecting him. Or he could go round to another friend, manager of a department in a museum, whose rooms were full of strange cases and bottles, and over whose microscope they had spent many an absorbing hour together. There were calls he ought to pay that afternoon at one or two houses where he was always welcome, and where he liked to be when he once reached them. And there was a certain young clerk in the business, whose ambitions were outrunning his slender strength, whom

he had long intended to look up in his private life. Young Felix Harding reminded him of his own boyish days ; he was making the same preposterous demands on life and on his own strength.

Edward Hay finished his breakfast, turned round to the fire, and went on reading. His landlady came and cleared away. The drizzle continued to trickle down the window-panes, the rain lay in pools on the blackened ground of the square, a milkwoman was clattering her cans at an area close by, and the bells of the gloomy church which towered at the corner were ringing for Morning Service. At Byron Villa he had always gone to church at least once every Sunday ; it had been the delight of his mother to have him at her side, and there had always been the chance of seeing Flora Moore. Now he listened to the bells impatiently ; there seemed to him to be no sense in their ringing. " Alone you bear and conquer," he repeated to himself, and sat for some time staring into the fire. The book dropped from his hand. He was not a man who

found comfort in pipe, or animals ; since he resented the constraints of a city life, why should he doom any creature to the same feelings ? The one impulse that had ever lain strongest within him began to stir him once more, the one thought that still had power to cause his pulses to beat one degree quicker.

When he had sat for some time immovable as a statue, he slowly said aloud—

“ A boundless Possible before me ! There is no one else to rout me up, I must do it for myself. I must have been created to be more than the well-conducted automaton I am now.” Then he got up and proceeded to spread open on the table one of his most favourite books, an enormous atlas.

He opened it at the map of Europe. Out of England, Paris was the only place he had visited. Thither he had once or twice been on business for his uncle. He looked at all the countries, trying to think in which of them he would take his next holiday. A sense of the fitting connection of all studies began to strike him. Who so capable of

enjoying travel as one who had studied many a language? Raising his eyes for a moment, while he mentally made a calculation as to how many months must elapse before he should decide to take his holiday, his eye fell upon a book of his father's, the delight of his boyhood, but which for years he had not looked at. He fetched it, and, as he began once more to dip into its pages, the old charm came back; he was again a boy in the old window-seat of his father's study, with all the world before him, and all his life untried. Spain, Spain—he could go there at last.

“Spain never changes,” he read. “She has undergone far more than Naples had ever to bear, and yet the fate of Naples has not been hers. There is still valour in Asturia, generosity in Aragon, probity in Old Castile, and the peasant women of La Mancha can still afford to place a silver fork and a snowy napkin beside the plate of their guest. . . . No people on earth are prouder than the Basques, but theirs is a kind of republican pride. They have no nobility amongst them, and no one will

acknowledge a superior. They are faithful and honest, and capable of much disinterested attachment ; kind and hospitable to strangers."

Among his many and miscellaneous grammars, translations, and foreign books he thought surely he had something in Basque. He got up, rummaged in a never-unpacked box of books and pamphlets, and presently discovered a Gospel of St. Luke. Partly through his knowledge of the chapter in English, partly through the attention he had at one time given to this tongue, he read what his eye fell upon as he opened the little book, and suddenly, for the first time, the meaning of the familiar words became plain to him—"Eta eztute erranen : huna, hemen da, edo han da : ecen huna Jaincoaren, erresuma çuen barnean da." "Neither shall they say, Lo here ! or, lo there ! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you."

This people had always both interested and fascinated him ; what was there now to hinder his going among them ? He turned to the map of Spain ; he would go by sea,

enter from the south, and wander, as the writer of the book before him had wandered, till he reached the district where a few sailors and shepherds were still actually speaking the Euscarra language. A pursuit seemed to offer itself which could not disappoint him as his fellow-man had done.

He put on his hat and coat, went out, and walked for miles in the drizzle, through the squares and streets, thinking.

When the next summer came, he started off, in spite of a certain amount of ridicule on the part of his friends, who reminded him that it was much too hot a time of the year to visit that part of Europe.

"I know it is," he replied. "I like being too hot."

All through Andalusia he wandered, now on foot, now riding; but the time was all too short, and he had to return to London before he had got any further.

The following year he went again, and, journeying by rail to begin with, he found himself at Madrid, with a considerable amount of leisure still before him in which

to start again on the wanderings to which he had all the year looked forward.

And this time an adventure befell him.

He came one day to a harbour on the northern coast of Spain. Here he stayed many days in a dark and dirty inn, whose ancient walls the brilliant waters of the harbour washed. Here, on a broad balcony, supported by beams of black oak, he would sit drinking his coffee in the afternoons, watching the shipping below him, and talking to his host or hostess, neither of whom ever seemed to have anything to do except to lounge about and answer his questions.

There was a fine-looking sailor who attracted his attention by his unusual size and strength, and by his free and independent bearing. Once an equally fine and independent-looking woman came and spoke to him. She had lost two front teeth, and had grey in her hair; a boy and girl were with her. He tried in vain to understand what they were saying, and turned to his host inquiringly. The Spaniard took his pipe out of his mouth and answered—

“They are Basques. She does not belong here, though he does. They came here when he married. Castora’s home is over the border in the mountains. Pedro makes long voyages, and she stays here. He is very daring.”

Edward Hay went out for many a sail with Pedro ; they became friends. One day there was a great storm, and, trying to make the mouth of the harbour, Pedro and a mate were drowned, and Edward Hay and another were hardly rescued.

The following day he went to see Castora and her children. The dignity and patience with which she bore what was evidently a more than common loss, struck him forcibly, as did her simple pleasure at the broken sentences in her own tongue with which he was able to convey his sympathy for her, and his admiration of her lost husband. When he left the harbour the thought was still uppermost in his mind, “I should like to do something for that woman ; how can she support those children ?”

In a few days he reached the mountains.

All his life afterwards he could recall that day, when, having toiled up a long, long road, he found himself among them at last, towering above and beyond him; while turning his back on them he looked down into France on the fair plain where the river, issuing from between the gorges of the here sloping range, wound itself into the sea. Lying among the billows of the lower slopes of the mountains were little villages dotted here and there. A great, silent, unfrequented country up here; peak after peak rising above and around, vultures soaring far overhead, boats like tiny dots floating on the glittering sea far below. All this he noted as he sat down on the grass, consulted his map and his compass, and decided that somewhere near should be a certain village just on the border where he intended to stay the night, partly because it was only eight miles from the first little French town he was making for, and partly because he had heard that it was Castora's birthplace, and he had an idea that he might ascertain what hope there was of her main-

taining herself there amongst her relations. He took some lunch from his knapsack and leaned his length comfortably against a tree which seemed to have been felled without purpose, and equally without purpose to have been left there.

He gazed around him. The slopes of the mountains abounded in groups of oaks and chestnuts, brilliant broom and heath, while the dark green of the box tree adorned every nook and ledge. Far below, the river was hurrying over detached rocks; in some places the banks rose in precipices from the water's edge; further on, expanding, there was room for patches of cultivation, where were rich crops of vines, melons, calabashes, and maize. Looking through his glasses he could descry far away against the horizon the sandy "Landes" beyond Bayonne, its cathedral towers, and the Adour flowing into the sea. The sun's rays were full upon him; he lay down on the short grass and pulled his broad-brimmed hat low over his face, and saw the opposite slopes through the blades of grass on which his cheek was

resting. Dotted about on that slope were flocks of silky-haired Pyrenean sheep, and a few goats climbing from rock to rock; magpies and crows were flying and hopping around. In his own immediate neighbourhood all was uncultivated, grassy, stony, silent. By-and-by, turning on his back, he again beheld a speck hovering in the sky above him, and was reminded that the vulture had already scented his lunch.

Long he lay there, lazily recalling memories out of the past history of this country-side, and of the wars that had devastated it.

“In hundreds of places the passes might be defended by twenty resolute men against a host of invaders,” he remembered reading. “How exactly true,” he pondered, looking around him. Then his thoughts turned back to the sordid and hated life at Byron Villa. How intolerable now seemed the recollection of that close, oppressive attic in which he had sat for hours, on days as hot as this, studying those tongues which it was now such a gratification to him to be able to

speaking! How especially hateful to him had been the sultry day on which his sister had exhibited the tinsel fire-ornament with such pride, and on which the ill-cooked dinner had been set before him! Mingled with all that was so distasteful to him came the remembrance of his mother's ever-ready sympathy and unobtrusive affection. He sighed, and reflected, "One cannot get rid of one set of abominations without losing all the good that is mixed in with them."

Then, closing his eyes, fragments of thoughts passed through his sleepy mind in effortless order, quotations which he scarcely recognized as such, so aptly they fitted with his mood.

" 'Happy he
With such a mother! faith in womankind
Beats with his blood, and trust in all things high
Comes easy to him, and tho' he trip and fall
He shall not bind his soul with clay.' "

"I expect some day, somewhere, I shall find her—that woman whom I have always been in love with.

"Yes, 'By these changeless heavens,' I know that she exists, somewhere.

“ ‘ Now, by the verdure on thy thousand hills
 . . . doth the earth appear
 Quite good enough for men to overbear
 The will of God in. We lift a cry
 Against this work-day world, this ill-spread feast,
 As if ourselves were better certainly
 Than what we come to.’

“ ‘ Sweetest eyes were ever seen ’—where
have I read that? It is an echo out of a
past dream, which surely some day will be-
come to me a reality?

“ ‘ Quid brevi fortes jaculamur aevo
 Multa? quid terris alio calentes
 Sole mutamus? patriae quis exsul
 Se quoque fugit?’

“ That’s true enough. A man can’t escape
from himself, but he can sometimes put
himself into surroundings in which ‘ himself ’
has one more chance.

“ I suppose this is a platitude, or perhaps
it is that every saying becomes a platitude
to a man as soon as he has proved its
truth in his own person; before that it seems
to him quite a beautiful inspiration, and
singularly applicable to his neighbour.”

Then all thought seemed suspended, and

he lay half asleep, absorbed in the sun, the silence, and the grandeur around him.

By-and-by, his face scorched copper-colour, and his body baked through, he got up and resumed his way. Towards night-fall he drew near to the little straggling village.

Taking a short cut down a dried-up water-course, he came out on a neglected grass lane skirting a wall. The wall enclosed a garden, and in the middle of the garden stood a white house half covered by a magnolia growing up it. Its green-painted shutters were closed, the border in the middle of the grass in front was grown over with rose bushes ; Spanish chestnuts, acacias, and a broad Judas tree swayed gently in the breeze, and cast long shadows over the grass. Facing him on a white board was written "*Maison à vendre.*"

Edward Hay leaned over the wall and stared. The words reminded him that the house stood in France, but he was amused at their futility ; who would be likely to come by here, and see that this house was

to be sold? Who would want to buy it if they did come by? He could see that the lane he was in led out on to the high-road through the village, the road which he would traverse to-morrow, and which should bring him straight by meadow and stream and poplar avenue into the small town of Bains. There was an iron gate in the wall; he opened it, went into the overgrown garden and round to the other side of the house, where he saw its name over the porch, "Los Granados." Then he began to wonder much that the house was to be let or sold at all, so magnificent was the view of valley, river, and sea from its vine-covered veranda, so balmy was the air, so sweet the scent from the roses growing on this side in abundance.

He turned and looked up at the house, white, two-storied, balconied. Behind it rose the mountains he had just come down from; before it on the slope lay the almond, the peach, the chestnut trees of the few houses in the village. Close to the road stood the ancient church, with tower and sun-dial and

clock, and hard by were the whitened walls of the "paume" court, which he had observed was an indispensable amusement in a Basque village. He walked round the enclosure. A few yards from the house was a small substantially built stable and room for a cart. He came out through the tall, narrow iron gate, closed it behind him, and stood leaning over the wall again. The last rays of the setting sun caught the vane on the church, the hands of the clock, fell upon the tops of the trees, and glittered for a moment or two on the brazen knocker of the house door. The landscape was flooded with yellow light; it shone on the waters of the winding river, on the backs of the cows beside it, and on the orange-coloured skirt of the girl who was driving them. It shone on the stern face of Edward Hay, and melted it into a smile out of sheer sympathy with the scene. Then, as the light faded away, he turned to go down into the village, and said to himself, "I shall buy that house. I feel as though I had come home."

Before he returned to London he had

completed its purchase, and sent for and settled Castora in it as housekeeper. Young Pedro and Brigitte were sent to school in the village.

Henceforth to furnish, beautify, enrich, and improve Los Granados became the great interest of his life.

It was springtime in the following year before he was able to revisit it.

One day, having been into Bains to consult with a resident to whom he had an introduction about buying some shrubs, he was returning to San Pascual, intending to walk home at night over the mountains, when into the train came a party of English people, evidently winter visitors at Bains. As he never spoke to his countrymen abroad if he could avoid it, he sat down with his back to them, and allowed their stream of talk to pass him unnoticed till the clear sweet voice of a girl, imploring for information which nobody seemed able to give to her, made him turn round and offer her the explanation. The party looked rich and well-assorted and comfortable, quite British

in their evident objection to his efforts to enlighten the girl. No doubt she was engaged to the dark-haired youth, beautiful as Apollo, who followed her every movement with adoring eyes. He observed them more closely when he came upon them again in the tram on their way into San Pascual, and could not help taking compassion on, and acting as guide to, the good-hearted little man who was evidently the leader of the party, and hopelessly at sea now that the losing of a train had landed them all in Spain.

They seemed to him to be just like most other well-to-do tourists, the only exception being the extremely Saxon-looking girl with the clear shining blue eyes of childhood, the masses of yellow hair, and the fearless mien and voice of one who has never been opposed either by circumstances or people. Her interest all that tiring afternoon seemed unflagging, and she entered into all she saw in a hearty manner, while her quick, dictatorial orders to the two tired children, and her distracting sweetness of manner to the

Apollo-like youth afforded him more interest than girls ever inspired him with. One hour merged into another, and he found himself setting aside the object for which he had come into San Pascual, in order that he might pilot this little party of waifs safe out of Spain again. The situation amused him. Everybody took his services as a matter of course except the girl, who with eye or speech thanked him continually. Now and then he surprised a look between her and the youth, and read her unconsciousness of his marked devotion. He began to wonder how such a girl could have been produced, and he sighed, for he thought, "There is nothing so beautiful, and, in its way, so perfect, as a young first love. It will be a pity if she does not understand him."

They all waited in some public gardens while the good-natured little man sent some telegrams, and, finding himself for the moment of no use, he turned aside and stood staring into the fountain. The girl came to him, and, looking in his face with those

childlike eyes, asked him to come and sit down on her bench.

“What a kind girl, and how simple!” was his thought, but his heart gave no bound. “The world will soon spoil her, and she will learn to pretend, and to be self-conscious, and to flirt,” he thought, as he turned and followed her to the seat.

Later on, before going to the station, he piloted, at their request, some of the party to a shop. It pleased him to serve the girl so full of gratitude, so, lighting a cigarette, he waited outside the shop. A sense of having always known her had come over him during the few hours he and she had been thrown together. He could have foretold that she would in a few minutes come outside to look for him, though when she did come, and asked him why he had waited, all he replied was, “Your brother-in-law will get cheated without me.”

Then suddenly she asked him about his occupation, and her question brought him down to London life and its social standards, and he and she seemed no longer kindred

spirits wandering unfettered, but were once more girl and man, liable to be judged by the narrow standards, out of which he had lifted himself into the freedom of his mountain home.

"To know my business would not interest you," he replied, stiffening, for he felt that the languid, elegant woman, her sister, was only tolerating his chance company for the sake of the use he was to her husband.

What a talisman was a word! he kept thinking. Could he have said he was a Colonel, an Admiral, a Civil Servant, or half a dozen other things, he would have been looked upon as an equal without more ado; but to say "I am in business" would probably mean that a whole process of wondering, or proving, or excusing, would be mentally gone through before they would accept him on his own merits. Before Flora Moore's rebuff on this score, his position had never for a moment troubled him. It had never occurred to him that he was not any man's equal; but she had vulgarized the world for him. He did not intend to give this out-

spoken girl an opportunity of doing it again. He had long known that it had been his curse to love Flora Moore.

But this girl presently surprised him with her talk about drawings and machines. Evidently she had been brought up to admire, and to participate in labour; it gave him comfort to talk with her. "Do you live on your own land, as we do?" she asked him. Probably, then, she was not only rich, but came of a family who would be ingrained with honourable characteristics of their own, so different from the veneer on many of the rich mushroom families he had been thrown with.

"For manners are not idle, but the fruit of loyal nature and of noble mind," he reflected, while she stepped along at his side across the square, and they guided the tired children between them. Then she stopped to admire the night, and he, letting loose his thoughts as to an appreciating friend, quoted poetry to her, and then wished he had not done it. How strange and daring she looked to him, who had

been so steeped in disappointments and small annoyances, as she stood beside him in her splendid young strength and announced, "I do not intend to have any trouble"!

For the first time in his life it occurred to him that it might be worth while to have seen the ups and downs of life, to have tasted all its bitterness and all its disappointments, if it could enable him to stand as a support to impetuous, daring souls like this. He replied, "It would be better to learn to meet it bravely, and be strong in spite of it." And she looked at him as though he spoke in a foreign tongue.

She laughed at his definition of the place where he lived, and he was conscious of feeling "ridiculously sensitive," as Herbert Moore often called him. When they reached the station, something stronger than himself urged him out of his habitual reticence, to say, "I hope you will remain just as you are;" and he felt as though he might as well have uttered the words to a baby for all the comprehension of them that lay in her fair,

eager face, as she pitied him for pursuing his journey alone. Yes, no doubt, to this joyous young creature, to be *alone* would be the one possible horror.

As he recrossed the square after parting from them, he glanced at the card the little man had given him—"Meakin," and the address of a London club. "A foolish name," he thought, as he tore it up and threw away the pieces. His own card he had seen accidentally dropped by Mr. Meakin.

"Sarah," the children had called the girl. A noble young creature; the simple name suited her, he thought.

The years slipped by. Edward Hay's over-sensitiveness and his irritable views of life disappeared. Los Granados had healed him. As time went on he was able to take a longer holiday. Sometimes one friend, sometimes another, came out to Los Granados with him.

One early summer he invited out his sisters and their husbands and one or two of their children. They came by sea as far as Bordeaux, and arrived in the mountains

an unusually sweet-tempered, enthusiastic collection of beings. Castora welcomed and spoiled Ada King's boys, and Augusta's shy little girl was the pet of the village during her stay.

"Well, Ned, we have chaffed you enough about your 'den in the mountains,'" cried the now portly Tom King, one afternoon when the whole party were sitting on the veranda enjoying their coffee, "but, upon my word, I call this a Paradise, a regular Garden of Eden. It only wants an Eve to be perfect."

"My dear fellow, you forget ; it was Eve who did the mischief, and got him turned out," laughed Herbert Moore, who was exhibiting to his little girl a lizard he had caught on the wall, and which now peeped out from between his fingers.

"Give me some more coffee, Ada, please," asked Edward Hay of his sister, who was presiding.

Mrs. King beamed upon him as in the old days, and filled up his cup.

"What a capital housekeeper this woman

makes!" she said. "I expect she and 'Eve' will have words when you bring her here."

"Why should I bring anybody into my Eden?" he asked, laughing. "I'm getting quite an old gentleman now, am I not, Jess?"

The timid child looked at him.

"Not *very* old. You have got more grey in your hair than father, and mother has none."

They laughed.

"Uncle Ned ought to have grey in his hair; he is master of all this place, and is a very wise, clever man," answered her mother.

"Don't, Augusta; the child will be terrified of me."

"No," said little Jess, looking up in her mother's face, "he isn't *very* wise, not wise so as you are frightened; he gave me this," and she touched the string of lapis lazuli beads round her neck.

"There, Ned, there's a triumph for you," cried Herbert Moore.

"How well Jessie seems to be getting on! But I wish she were not so proud," Edward Hay remarked. "I wanted her to come

out here too, but she would not let me stand treat, and of course she can't afford the journey out of her nurse's pay."

"Just like you, Edward dear. Never mind. She is quite happy, and such a darling little nurse," declared Mrs. King.

"You seem to be quite an authority about here, Ned," began Herbert Moore. "Down in Bains the English colony seem to count upon you for organizing all their expeditions, and for getting up all their amusements, when you are here. We have been hearing a lot about you at the club this morning. Everybody thinks you are enormously rich."

"Yes, I know they do. I have grown into all the interests of the place. It is quite true," he said.

"I like to hear them call you 'Monsieur Edouard.' I suppose *Hay* is a troublesome word for foreigners," began Tom King. "And, I say, I counted, and within the last three days there have been seven sets of pedestrians stopping here for information about the mountain passes. I believe some of them only did it for a chance of having a

look at your garden, or seeing if you were not going to ask them in for coffee and a rest."

"I dare say," laughed Edward Hay. "I often do. Castora does not always approve; she never allows me to be imposed upon."

"I suppose you never let your house at this time of the year, do you?" asked Augusta.

"*Dios mio*, no!" he said energetically, "no, indeed; I always want it myself."

"Where does Castora go when you let the place?" she asked again.

"She goes down to Bains and hires herself out as cook to the Spanish families who go there for the summer sea-bathing. She has a genius for cooking, and is very much sought after, I can assure you."

"I'm not surprised," said Ada King. "She seems perfectly devoted to your interests. I can't think how you dared to start having a foreigner, though."

"It was all quite simple. I had taken a great fancy to poor Pedro. Also I knew the characteristics of her race," he replied.

"They are extremely pious, too. I dare say you noticed, Tom, that when the *Angelus* sounded when we were in the Bains market yesterday, every man raised his cap and stopped short in his bartering over pig or ox?"

Tom King nodded.

"That does not apply all over France, I imagine," he said.

"Who did you let to last year?" demanded Augusta, pursuing her subject.

"I forget. The agent managed it."

"*His agent!* Hark!" cried Ada King, laughing. "Who would have thought in the old days of our Edward having *an agent* at his disposal?"

"Which old days? The days when our grandfather was also a man of means?" he asked her.

"Yes. Now is not that an example of the way in which the fortunes of a family are judged?" moralized Herbert Moore. "You have but lifted yourself up again into your rightful position, Ned, while here are these dear illogical women remembering only the

days of their hewing of wood and drawing of water."

"Let us forget them," he replied gravely; "I should be sorry to be poor again. Poverty has its uses, but it is apt to dwarf a man's very soul."

"That's true enough, Ned, my boy. No one of us has had such a bitter pill to swallow as you. And a good thing too, for I'm bound to say not one of us could have swallowed it with such an amiable countenance as you did."

"Quite true, Tom dear," cried his delighted wife. "Gus and I never minded half as much as he did. I'm sure nobody deserves riches and success so well as Edward; he has made his own life. I call him splendid."

Her brother laughed.

"How you do spoil a man!" he said. Then, after a pause, he turned to Herbert Moore and asked, "What news have you from Flora?"

Mrs. King and Mrs. Moore glanced at each other. He had never mentioned Flora since the old days.

"She is well, and I suppose happy. Green is kind to her, and she likes India," returned Herbert Moore, who had suffered too much from Flora at home, to be over-fond of her.

"Ah, I am glad of that. How long ago it all seems!"

"It does," replied Herbert Moore. Then, seeing that his brother-in-law had purposely opened the conversation, he added, as he stretched himself out at his ease in his cane seat, "Yes, all those things seem ages ago. Now I consider we have all arrived at the most comfortable period of the life of man; all our follies, all our mistakes behind us, and a fair share of years left before us to use our wisdom in, on behalf of our children."

"A pleasing reflection, especially for me," remarked Edward Hay, drily.

Tom King burst out laughing.

"You made a wrong end to your peroration, Herbert. You might have finished up with, 'on behalf of others,' then that would have included old Ned. I don't fancy bachelors relish hearing such paternal purrings as yours and mine are apt to be."

"We count in Ned, of course ; there is a sort of universal fatherhood about him," grumbled Herbert Moore.

"You are not very lucid," said Edward Hay, laughing, "but I dare say you know what you mean yourself. Do not agitate your kind selves about my bachelor condition. I have no doubt I shall change it when I see anybody that interests me sufficiently."

"How nice!" sighed Ada King, in her simple motherly way.

"Have you ever seen anybody that interested you lately?" demanded Augusta.

"Oh yes," he replied cheerfully.

"Who? Tell us!" cried his sisters eagerly.

"I don't know," he said, amusing himself by watching their excitement.

"Oh, you are a tease! Where did you see her?"

"In a railway-train."

"Well!" they cried breathlessly.

"Well," he repeated, laughing, "it was ten years ago ; that is all."

"Don't you know her name?"

"Yes. Sarah."

"Sarah—what?"

"I have not the least idea."

"I dare say it was some little child," declared Augusta, leaning back in a disappointed manner. "And such a horrid ugly name, too!"

"No; she was a tall creature of eighteen, English."

"Come, that is satisfactory," said Ada King.

"Never seen her since?" asked her husband.

"Never, and never likely to. She is probably married long ago to the Greek God who was one of the party."

Everybody laughed.

"Well," sighed Mrs. King, "you might as well look for a needle in a bundle of hay as expect to meet her again, and unmarried, and be lucky enough to fall in love with each other. So your chances of matrimony are as remote as ever, I am afraid."

"Exactly. Just what I think myself, my dear Ada."

The following spring, for the first time at that season of the year, his agents received permission from Mr. Hay to let Los Granados, if they could. The three brothers-in-law had planned to take their holiday together in Italy. But, shortly before the time fixed for starting, the young man Felix Harding fell seriously ill at last. On going to see him (in a home the very repetition of Byron Villa, kept up on means far smaller) Mr. Hay discovered that in the doctor's opinion there was little chance for him but to go at once to a warmer climate.

"He might as well have told me to go to the moon," said the young man. "And how is my mother going to be kept, I should like to know?"

Mr. Hay sat down, and then and there told him that he should take him out to Los Granados as soon as he could travel.

There was nothing over-strung, or over-reticent about Felix Harding. It was easy to help him. It had been the delight of his life to work under Mr. Hay, and the prospect

of merely being in his society was like a tonic to him.

Mr. Hay suddenly remembered on his way back to his rooms the permission he had given to his agents. He went into a telegraph office and sent them a message.

The reply came back, "Too late; house let; parties already started."

Mr. Hay was annoyed, but nevertheless he wrote to Tom King, telling him they must find another man to go with them.

"I shall take Harding to Bains; it is sheltered enough. It will be a distinct bore to be so near, and to be unable to get into my own house," he pondered. "But when the people are gone I shall take him up there, and leave him with Castora for the summer, poor chap."

So he, with much patience and care, at last got his sick charge safely to Bains, and there established himself in some rooms overlooking the small quay, where the sunshine poured in most of the day, and where Felix could watch from his sofa the passers-by, and the sardine-boats coming in.

Everybody rejoiced that Mr. Hay had come back again. There were some pleasant people at the hotel, and his old friends, the retired French Colonel, the intelligent Basque Curé, and the Spanish head of the bank, welcomed him with effusion, delighted at the chance which had obliged him to dwell in Bains itself for the next two months. Mr. Hay said he was not at all delighted, that he grudged Los Granados to everybody when he wanted it himself, and especially grudged Castora as his tenant's cook just when he required her as nurse for Felix Harding.

CHAPTER II.

ONE glorious afternoon, when the air was full of the scents of blossoming trees and flowering shrubs, when every window was thrown open, and every invalid in Bains was sunning himself on the *Plage*, when women sat before their doors roasting coffee berries, and children were coming home from school without their winter jackets, Mr. Hay was returning from a walk along the cliff. He had been up to the golf-ground, and was hastening back to induce Felix Harding to go within doors before sunset. His nearest way lay through the little cemetery on the side of the hill. He was striding through it, the dazzling sun in his face, when from behind a high stone monument a lady suddenly stepped off the grass on to the path

in front of him. He drew aside to allow her to pass, but she stood still, staring in his face. Then suddenly she cried, in English—

“Oh, I do believe it is you!”

Her voice recalled some memory. He looked at her searchingly, lifting his hat. She was in deep mourning. He did not remember her; he said nothing.

“You have forgotten,” she went on, an accent of disappointment in her voice. “I suppose I am so changed. I know it is you.”

“I do not recall your name,” he said, puzzled.

“You never heard it, and I do not know yours. It is a long time ago. You helped us all one day when we lost our train in Spain. Do you not remember?”

The puzzling memory flashed into reality. He smiled.

“I remember now,” he said, looking in vain in her face for the pink cheeks and azure eyes and childlike expression.

“Are you staying here?” she asked eagerly.

“Yes. Are you?”

"No; I am staying a long way off. I only strolled into the cemetery to wait till the pony-cart was ready."

"I hope your sister is well, and the bright little children," he asked.

"Oh yes. They are big children now, and have brothers and a sister. What a lot of trouble they gave you that day!"

"It was no trouble," he said, marking the fact that there had been as yet no smile on her face.

She lingered. He looked at her, thinking, "Can it be 'Apollo' she is in mourning for?" Then she said, lifting sad eyes to his face—

"You remember I told you I did not intend to have trouble. You told me it would be better to face it and be strong. It is very difficult to be strong, I find, when all the meaning is gone out of your life."

"For a time—only for a time," he replied earnestly. "Believe me, the meaning of life will return to you if you will have patience."

"I suppose so. Since you say it, it is most likely true," she answered, with a sigh.

“Oh, how glad I am to have met you again!”

“It is very kind of you,” he said, feeling helpless under this sudden fervour.

“Kind!” she repeated, with a touch of the old eager ardour he remembered as her chief characteristic. “Kind of me! Why, you might as well say it is ‘kind’ of the thirsty earth to drink up the rain when it falls upon it.”

“Have you so few friends that the words of a passing stranger should hold such value for you?” he asked gravely.

She looked thoughtfully at him, then moved out of the narrow pathway on to the grass again, so that he might pass on. She held out her hand, saying—

“I am keeping you; I beg your pardon. But you did not seem to me to be only a ‘passing stranger.’ Good-bye.”

And even while he took her hand, she turned aside from him towards the monument she had been looking at, and there was nothing left for him to do but to pursue his way. At the turn in the road which led

round the side of the slope on which the cemetery stood he looked up. Her black figure, leaning against the high stone Calvary, stood out against the bright blue sky. She had one arm reaching round the stone, her head leaning against it; her face was looking out sadly over the sea.

“Acquainted with grief,” were the words which came into his mind. Then he thought to himself, “What a bungling ass I have made of myself! I might have known she would not be likely to grow up into the kind of woman who would greet one in any stereotyped way. I wonder where she is staying? How she is altered!”

As for her, she listlessly wandered about the cemetery, now looking at this name, now at that—“Kiliscabia,” “Etchebaster,” “Dargaignaratz,” “Barnetche.” She paused some time before the words—

GRACIEUSE DURONEA,

DÉCÉDÉE LE 21 AVRIL,

Âgée de 21 ans.

“ ‘Gracieuse Duronea’! What a pretty

name! I wonder if she was glad to die; I should be. Uncle Dol would be rather sorry, of course, but then he has his own children."

Thus soliloquizing, she passed from one stone to another, hung with their black-beaded wreaths, and wondered that so sweet a spot could be made to look so ugly, and pondered on the strangeness of the names, and was glad that they were different in kind from any others she had ever seen. She thought she would like every experience now to be a new one. Then she sat down on the low wall.

"I am glad I have seen him again. Perhaps I may meet him somewhere, and be able to explain myself better. It was foolish of me to suppose he would remember after all these years, and much more foolish of me to suppose that he would understand. Jessie said people ought not to be always expecting to receive sympathy; they ought to be content with being allowed to give it. I never met any girl so funny and so wise as Jessie."

Thus her thoughts went on from one

thing to another till a quaint-looking little carriage, with an unmistakably English servant in it, driving a stout pony, rattled up the cobble-stones to the cemetery gate.

She rose wearily, got in, and was rattled out on to the high-road, and so away up the hill.

The next day, Mr. Hay, having settled his invalid on the balcony in the sunshine, with a book in his hand and an awning over his head, ordered his horse and rode away out of Bains and up to Los Granados to give Pedro some orders about his garden.

The air was sweet with the golden gorse which clothed the sides of the road, the whitethorn was in luxuriant blossom, the yellow fluffy edges of the blossoming willow near the ditches caught the sunlight, magpies hopped hither and thither in a leisurely manner. Low carts, piled with wood and drawn by oxen yoked by the head, came slowly along, their blue-bloused drivers whistling behind them. Many of them knew Mr. Hay by sight, and greeted him as they passed. He could have found his way in

the dark to Los Granados, so familiar was the road, so endeared to him was every detail of the surrounding country. There was the long stretch of road, lined on either side by rows of poplars, straight as sentinels ; the turn in the road over the wooden bridge ; beneath it either the river flowing, or only a bed of ooze, with a sluggish stream in its midst, according to whether the tide was high or low ; the green meadows on either side ; the maize fields, now only filled with bare white stalks. As the road wound higher and higher there were the goats on the scattered rocks, and the silky-haired sheep with their slender black legs, feeding on the short grass. In woods on either side, the trees were overgrown with mistletoe, their trunks pillars of brilliant mosses. Through all this he rode till he reached the village, and so, passing the church and the paume court, he turned up the lane and pulled up before the iron gate of Los Granados. Pedro looked out from the wood-shed. Seeing who it was he came towards the horse, the sweet, large smile of his race breaking over his

face in welcome. Mr. Hay addressed him in his own language, and inquired after Castora.

"Come in," answered Pedro, also in his own tongue, waving his hand royally towards the house as though it were his own, "come in. They are gone out."

Mr. Hay dismounted, and, leaving his horse with Pedro, strode round to the veranda, his whip under his arm, while he searched in his pockets for a parcel containing a present for Castora. His stern features relaxed into contentment as his eyes once more rested on his beautiful garden and dwelling. He strode straight from the veranda on to the floor of light inlaid wood of his *salon*, and there he stopped short, for, standing in the middle of the room, facing him, with her hat on, evidently about to go out, was the lady he had met the previous day.

For a moment they stood regarding one another. Then—

"*You!*" he said, in astonishment. "Is it here you are staying? Who with?"

"With nobody. I have nobody, you know,

except my dear and faithful servants," she replied.

"Who are you?" he demanded bluntly.

"I am Sarah Thornborough. I have rented this house for two months. A friend told me of it some time ago. I have been ill. As soon as I was well, I wrote to the agents, and was fortunate enough to find it at liberty. It is the most beautiful spot I have ever been in. The owner is a Mr. Hay."

A smile broke over his face.

"How very strange!" he said thoughtfully.

"Will you not sit down?" she said, pointing to a seat, and sitting down herself in his own especial chair. He sat down. "How did you know I was here?" was her next question.

"To tell you the truth I did not know you were here. The fact is, I am—that is to say—well, you see, the fact is, *I* am Mr. Hay."

"*You!*" she cried, leaning forward eagerly. "Is this *your* house?"

He nodded.

"Yes, Los Granados is mine."

For a moment neither of them spoke.

They stared at each other. Both were thinking that they were glad. Then Miss Thornborough said regretfully—

“Castora tells me that it is only by an accident I got the house ; that you intended to come here yourself, and bring your sick friend. Of course I did not know *you* were her master, and I was not so sorry to keep out the owner as I ought to have been. But I do not like *you* to be kept out of your own place ; I have no doubt I could find a house in Bains within the next few days.”

“Would you rather be here or there ?”

“Why here, of course ; there can be no comparison,” she answered.

“Then I hope you will remain here as long as you like. You say you have been ill. Let us hope that the place will cure you as it has cured me.”

“Have you been ill ?” she asked in a puzzled voice, surveying his strong brown face and broad shoulders.

He laughed.

“Not lately, and then not with illness that a doctor’s physic could cure,” he answered.

Then he was instantly filled with disgust that he had said so much, and was relieved that all she replied was—

“I understand.”

There came to the open window a woman also in mourning. She wore no cap, yet he received the impression that she was a person in service, but also a confidential friend. She looked at him searchingly, critically; he felt that her shrewd eyes turned him inside out in that look. He was amused, and liked her all the better for the “on guard” expression of her voice and manner. She addressed herself to Miss Thornborough with motherly solicitude.

“I came to see where you were, my dear. Shall I tell George that you will drive, or would you rather take a walk?”

“I will go for a walk with you, Susan, thank you. Tell George I would rather drive this afternoon.”

The woman honoured Mr. Hay with another searching, but perfectly respectful look, and retired.

“Susan is my old nurse, now my maid

and domineering adviser," observed Miss Thornborough, with a wan smile. "George is her brother. I find him very useful out here. He was wild to come and see Bains where Gideon had been—my cousin, you remember."

"A very handsome boy, who was one of your party that memorable day? I hope he is well," he said.

"He is dead, long ago," she replied drearily.

"I did not know. I am very sorry. I thought possibly——" He stopped awkwardly, glancing at her dress.

All her languid figure revived for a moment into vigour, as at some sudden remembrance; she leaned forward, looking intently at him, and said—

"Is it possible? Did you really think it was the loss of only dear Gideon that had struck all the life out of me like this, that has left me such a poor sort of creature?"

"I did not know. You forget I was unaware even of your name till five minutes ago," he reminded her.

"My *name!*" she repeated impatiently. "Does the chance fact of knowing a person's name make that person more your friend, than to find out you have no end of things in common with a person whose name you don't know?"

"Pray forgive me. You took me too literally. Tell me about your troubles, since you are good enough to consider me as a friend," he urged kindly.

But she had retired into herself; he had for the second time made her aware that the feeling of old friendship was all on her side. She sank back against the cushions of her chair listlessly, and said nothing. He could see that she had not regained her normal strength after some heavy shock. Languor or moodiness was no natural part of her. She lifted her eyes to his presently, and said, without any touch of offence—

"As you did not know I was here you came very likely to speak to Castora? Do not let me keep you."

He was conscious of feeling disappointed ;

he supposed he must have said something to hurt her.

"Look here," he said, "we do not seem to be understanding each other quite so well as we did ten years ago. Let me say, once and for all, that I shall be glad to be of any service to you that I can. Do not imagine that you are boring me, if you feel inclined to talk to me."

"Thank you, I should be glad to feel that. I have now a great many responsibilities and duties, and when I think over how best to fulfil them I am so puzzled. I have often thought, since it all fell upon me, that you would be the sort of man to help me, if I could see you. That is why I was so glad to meet you yesterday. It seemed an answer to what I had prayed for. And one so seldom seems to get an answer that I suppose I was unduly surprised and pleased."

There was a stateliness about her as she said all this, a regal manner of holding her chin in the air, and a repose about her hands and eyes which conveyed to him the

impression that she was speaking from soul to soul, and by no means for effect. He looked at her gravely, nodded his head slightly, in token that he heard her, but he said nothing.

"You remind me of Jessie; she spoke so much with her eyes too," she remarked.

"Do you know my sister Jessie?" he asked, surprised.

"Certainly. Oh, I forgot I had not told you. Our doctor sent for her to nurse me. I had never been ill before. I liked her. She was wise and strong, and when I was getting better I used to lie and watch her; she was such a lady. I beg your pardon," she added, seeing a smile breaking over his face; "I forgot she was your sister. But, don't you see that I never before had met a lady who worked for her living in that sort of way, and I had expected to find her only like our dear, good Susan, you know."

"I quite understand," he replied; "your feeling was most natural."

"We got to like each other extremely," she went on, "but she would not remain

with me when I began to get better ; she was sent for to a very severe case, and she went. She said I had had my full share of her attention," added Miss Thornborough, sadly smiling.

"That is very like Jessie. So, then, I suppose she advised you to come to Los Granados. Was that how you came?"

"She gave me the address of your agent, in case I ever decided to come. Jessie never mentioned her family, and I forgot to ask her. I merely knew Los Granados belonged to her brother. Trouble makes you so selfish, you see."

"Yes, that is true," he answered, wondering more and more at the odd chain of circumstances that had brought them all together, wondering also what the blow was which had necessitated his sister's service. For he was aware that Jessie liked best to be among only the most difficult or dangerous cases.

His eyes roved over the room, noting the additions of his present tenant. They fell upon a photograph on his writing-table.

There was a bowl of fresh violets and primroses in front of it. Something about the face struck him as familiar.

"May I look at that?" he asked.

To his surprise she rose slowly, her eyes filling with tears. Mechanically he got up too.

She turned aside, saying in a low voice, "Yes; I should like you to look at it. But it will not mean anything to you;" and, while he stretched out his hand for it, she went quickly out of the room.

"Her father, no doubt, poor thing!" he said to himself. "Thornborough! Where have I heard the name? Where can I have seen this face?"

Suddenly a memory came back to him of the office. He saw the very French letter he had been writing, the very blots of dried ink on the desk, the particular long black ruler into which the lad, young Harding, had cut his initials for him. Then he remembered the fine face of his uncle's visitor, who had one day passed through with him, and how his own miserable heart had beaten

in sudden sympathy with the cheerfully uttered words, "He that chiefly owes himself unto himself is the substantial man." Thornborough? Of course that had been the name of that singular man, who bore in his voice and in his carriage the culture and self-control of generations. That was the link, then. His old impression, as he and the girl had crossed the square together ten years ago, of her fineness and rarity came back, and with it the words, "Manners are not idle."

This man's daughter? No. For she had said she was an orphan. This must be the uncle, then. He could imagine how terrible the break might be in a life-companionship between two such beings. A sense of pleasure came over him, that he himself should be drawn both by circumstances and by her own inclination to be the successor of a man like this in the matter of "helping" her. He stood thinking. Was it for this that he had been denied that glittering piece of tinsel, Flora Moore, who had caught his boyish fancy, and nearly wrecked his young manhood? Was it for

this that he had struggled and studied ? To become one with his natural equals, such people as these ?

He looked into the eyes in the picture, the strong face of a man who had feared God and dealt justly by his enemy. The whimsical twinkle lurking in the corners of the mouth reminded him of Miss Thornborough as he had first seen her. This was the face of one who could be a good hater and a good lover, but in nothing merely mediocre. And the girl who had loved and lived with such a man as this, had chosen him to be her friend. Here, by chance, to his own house in the mountains, to the spot he had come in his own dark hour, she had come in hers ; it should not be his fault if she was not soon able to say of it, as he had said, " I have come home."

He was not conscious of making a choice as he stood there, he only suddenly became certain that Miss Thornborough and he himself were born to be man and wife ; the face of the picture seemed to sanction it. Dead or living, no matter, they were friends

by right of having the same standards, by right of thinking the same thoughts. That must have been her thought yesterday, when she claimed him as a friend ; how stupid he had been not to understand her ! He mechanically sat down in the chair at his writing-table, and, leaning his head on his hand, looked back into the day he had first seen her, went over her every look and tone ; then he passed her relations in review before him ; then turned once more to the picture of Mr. Thornborough, and looked for a long while at it. Then, curious to see all that belonged to her, he drew towards him a book that lay beside her writing-case. A slip of paper marked a page ; he opened it, and read the underlined words :—

“We are selfish men ;
O raise us up, return to us again ;
And give us *manners, virtue, freedom, power.*

“Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart ;
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea,
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free ;

“So didst thou travel on life’s common way
In cheerful godliness ; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.”

He turned to the fly-leaf. On it was written in a man's hand—

“Sarah Thornborough. From her old friend Uncle Dan.”

“I suppose she thinks those lines describe him,” he thought.

He closed the book, and took up another. It was a very shabby one, covered in faded grey silk, drawn together inside by long stitches of black cotton, from the top to the bottom. It was “The Saint's Everlasting Rest,” by Richard Baxter. Within was legible, in faded ink—

“To our son Dan, on his fifth birthday. From his attached parents, Gideon and Mary Thornborough. 1805.”

Mr. Hay laid down the book. “Good heavens!” he said to himself. “What a present for a baby of five! It was a stern upbringing, and yet it resulted in such a face as this!” and he again looked at the photograph.

“Mary and Gideon! I suppose this is a regular Puritan family. Tenacious in their love for their own acres and for each other, worth winning, worth holding.”

"Monsieur Edouard!" said Castora's voice at the door.

He shook off his musings and got up. She advanced into the room, her kindly face one large smile as she polished a small brown hand on her blue linen apron for him to take. Her grey hair was bound up in a black silk handkerchief, and she wore a blue cotton skirt and jacket. She was beaming with delight at seeing him once more. They greeted each other in her own language, then relapsed into French, which she spoke with equal readiness and he with considerably more. Then he followed her out to the yard to see her chickens, and to give his advice about Brigitte going as *bonne* to Madame Rose, a Frenchwoman by birth, the second wife of the English chaplain in Bains. Pedro was exchanging jokes and French words for English with Miss Thornborough's man, as he washed down the carriage. Mr. Hay noticed a lady's saddle hanging up.

"Does Miss Thornborough ride?" he asked in English.

The man stopped in his work, and replied proudly—

“Anything, sir. She would manage a wild tiger if you set her to ride one. There isn’t any animal she can’t manage, and I ought to know, for I had the teaching of her, and of Master Gideon, too.”

Mr. Hay saw that not to know the annals of the Thornborough family would be the one true form of ignorance in the eyes of this worthy servant.

“I brought that,” pursued the man, nodding at the saddle. “Miss Sarah thought she might find a horse here, but, bless you, sir, there’s nothing fit for *her* to mount. I could not see her on one of them patchy-skinned mules.”

Mr. Hay laughed.

“I will send up a decent animal for her in a day or two,” he said.

“Do, sir. A good gallop is what she wants, and there’s a nicish bit of road I’ve been up to with Pedro here, where I might take her safely. This little beast here can carry me. Will they let us over the border,

sir ? By what I can make out from Pedro, they do seem mighty particular about horses going to and fro in these parts, and not much to be mighty particular about neither. It's very poor cattle."

Mr. Hay explained their conversation to the eager and interested Pedro, who was already great friends with George, and was initiating him into the mysteries of the "jeu de paume" on Sundays, to the strong disapproval of his sister Susan Frant.

When Mr. Hay rode back again into Bains he was thoughtful, and all that evening he was but a silent companion to Felix Harding. After the young man had retired, Mr. Hay went out again, and paced the sandy little bay, and climbed the gorse-covered cliff against which the waves were gently washing in the moonlight, and strolled along under the myriads of stars, through the grass and heather, till, reaching a stone cross set up long ago to mark some terrible shipwreck and loss of life at this spot, he sat down at its base and stared out over the quiet waters. Long he sat there thinking,

and the subject he thought about was marriage, and the woman he thought about was Sarah Thornborough.

"Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?" came into his mind, and the answer was, "I was so glad to meet you yesterday. It seemed an answer to what I had prayed for."

When at last he got up to go home, his final thought was, "I was in love with Love before, now I am going to be in love with a woman. The question is, Will she ever be in love with me?"

After this Mr. Hay and Miss Thornborough saw a great deal of one another.

"Your friends in Bains will quite hate me," she said one day when she, wandering about in the wood of young oaks, saw him through the branches coming towards her from the house.

He laughed.

"So long as I do not incur your hatred for coming I can put up with theirs," he answered.

"I am glad, always glad whenever I see you," she said gravely.

He wished she did not find the truth quite so easy to say.

“Look at these asphodels,” she went on, “and these violets and narcissus. Seven kinds of mosses I have been counting, and white and blue hepatica. Was there ever such a wood? Every day I come here and find something fresh.”

“It is very beautiful,” he answered, looking at the colour which had begun to return to her pale face, and thinking how much stronger her voice seemed to be growing.

“Los Granados is healing me as you said it would. I am so grateful to it.”

He stooped and picked primroses and white hepatica and held them out to her.

“Wear these,” he said.

She took them silently, and put them into her dress. Wandering on she gathered violets here and there, till she had a small bunch; she bound them with a piece of grass, and said shyly—

“Will you have them?”

And Mr. Hay felt, as he took the flowers from her hand, as if nobody had ever in his

life before offered to give him anything. But all he said was—

“Thank you.”

He had by this time heard all about Meads, and had gathered tolerably well the sort of life she had been leading, and all the responsibilities that lay before her. They never met without some allusion being made to the subject. To-day, when she did so, he answered cheerfully—

“Shall I tell you what I think about all this perpetual anxiety of yours about being able to fulfil your obligations?”

“Please do,” she said.

“Well, I think you had better put Meads and your whole household right out of your head till you get into the train to return to it.”

“I can’t!” she replied.

“I should not think your family have been much in the habit of saying that, have they?”

She gave him an observant glance.

“You mean it is cowardly?”

“I do.”

“I have faced many a difficult thing

before, and have never been told *that*," she said.

"All the more reason why you should face this, then. Just now, the easiest thing to your state of mind is to worry, so you do worry, instead of making a stand against it."

"There are all my servants and dependents and tenants. Must I not trouble about their welfare?"

"Certainly. But you tell me you have an excellent bailiff. You are here for only a few weeks, and your object in being here is to get well. Give yourself up to your object. Accomplish it."

"I write to Jacob Frant, and he writes to me, twice a week. Do you consider that too often?"

"I do. Once a week would be sufficient, and once a fortnight would be better. Do you suppose I should ever get any real holiday if I did all my business from Bains? I might just as well remain in London."

"I should soon sink into apathy here," she replied drearily. "I feel as though I must keep on doing."

"That is the curse of to-day. When shall we learn that 'being' is worth at least quite as much as 'doing'?"

"That is a very modern theory, very easy to adopt as an excuse for being lazy," she objected doubtfully.

"Modern or not, the thought is pretty ancient. Will it help you to adopt it if I remind you of the words, 'He that believeth shall not make haste'?" he quoted gently.

They were silent a moment, then she said, as she had said once before—

"Since you say so, I believe it."

"I wish you were not so terribly submissive," he cried. "There is really no credit in opposing you."

She stopped and stared in his face.

"That is the first time in my life I have been called submissive. 'Dare-devil Sally' has always been my uncle's pet name for me. He hates a bread-and-butter miss."

"You don't look very dare-devilish at present, I must confess," he said, laughing at her puzzled face; "but, then, neither do you

look like a bread-and-butter miss ; so take comfort. Now I am going to take you to task on another point."

She made no reply, and he could see that she was not accustomed to be "taken to task," nevertheless he went on boldly—

"Why do you refuse every chance of being sociable with the good people of Bains ? Mrs. Rose tells me you will not even come in to tea quietly with her. You see, if you stay up here and brood, you might just as well not have come to Los Granados at all."

"I am in no mood for visiting. It is not expected of people in mourning," she answered coldly.

"The heart does not necessarily mourn any the less because a person endeavours to show a friendly and cheerful exterior," he replied.

"I do not owe these people any such effort ; it would be different if I were at home."

"I was not thinking so much of what you owe to them, but of what you owe to your-

self. We are never at our best when we are allowing ourselves to give in."

"Even a wounded animal can creep away into a hole and be alone. Is there no such solace legitimate for us, in our time of grief?" she asked defiantly.

"Seldom. It is a dangerous solace."

"You have a stern code. Yet you have known sorrow, and it has not hardened you, or you would not be troubling about me."

"In your experiences I am living over again my own, and, in seeking to help you, I find that it has been worth while to have suffered."

"I see," she replied sadly; then added, "it has made you bold."

"Not too much so, I hope," he said wistfully. "Bold enough to intrude into the sanctuary of your sorrow in order to help you; not bold enough to wound you, surely."

She stood still, a tall black figure against a bush of whitethorn, the sunshine gleaming through budding branches upon the gold of her hair and upon asphodel and narcissus growing at her feet. She smoothed between

her ungloved fingers a tuft of brilliant green moss ; her eyes were fixed thoughtfully on it. Her lips were trembling. He did not disturb her, but scrambled down through stumps and dry leaves into the road a few yards below, to speak to the driver of an ox-cart whom he knew. After a time she joined him there, and stood at his side listening to his halting sentences and to the driver's voluble ones.

"That *is* a strange tongue," she cried, when they were again alone. "I love to hear you speaking it. Uncle Dan always wanted to come here among the Basques ; that is really what made me choose this part of the world to come to. Let us sit down here, and you tell me all about this people."

They seated themselves on the bank beside the road. All was still around them except for the sound of the cart wheels growing less in the distance, or the fall of a twig on to the dry leaves behind them.

"Where shall I begin ?" he asked, as he pushed a large stone for her feet to rest upon.

"Well, have they no literature, no books that I could try and read ?"

"No. If it were possible for us to master the language, which is impossible, unless we had been brought up in it, we should not find any books in it that would interest us. They have little poetry. I have read that their music is very descriptive; you could imagine while listening to it that you could hear them marching down upon their enemies through these echoing mountains."

"They are a very handsome race. Such beautiful hands and feet—don't you think so?—and such a smile, and such a fine way of holding themselves. Castora, for instance, might be a queen."

"Yes, they are all that," he replied. "Then note what a country they dwell in, full of shade and sunshine, of mountain and streamlet, of echo and dangerous footpath, and enticing sunny heights bordered by a wild and generally dangerous sea. They are enterprising, strong, simple, a consequence of being a race of seamen and shepherds, and having all their dealings with Nature instead of with man."

"I asked Pedro, when I first came, if he

were French," she said, "and I was quite struck with the grand air with which he shook his head and replied, 'Je suis Basque.' I quite felt that to be *English* was in comparison a very small title of honour."

They both laughed.

"It is delightful to be among such a people," she went on. "Those medlar sticks, now, that they carry, I suppose in olden days they made pretty good use of the iron-spiked points?"

"No doubt," he answered. "'C'est son épée de gentilhomme,' says somebody, 'toujours prête à faire respecter son honneur, celui de sa fiancée, celui de son village.'"

"I think they are very handsome; the brasswork is so pretty, and the pattern on the wood. Pedro lent me his the other day, when I was going for a climb. What is this 'chasse aux palombes' I hear him speak of?"

"Ah, now you see that these people always must be hunting something. The Basque sailors have been the great whale-hunters, the inland men are all hunters by instinct, and you see their country naturally

abounds in birds of passage, and when bad weather obliges them to make a halt in the mountains, then is the grand opportunity for the chase of the wild wood-pigeon. The particular chase to which Pedro was probably alluding is the most notable about here. Near that village they stretch nets from tree or rock, and the pigeons secreted in the gorges are driven forth by the sound of the huntsmen's rattles. Then, by artificial hawks which they let fly at them, they become so terrified that they rush into the nets in flocks."

"I don't call that 'sport,'" cried Miss Thornborough, scornfully.

"It is strangely exciting, though. I have seen it myself," he replied.

"I do not like to think of it; I should like to feel there was no cruelty in a people who at fifty can dance as Castora can."

"They are as little cruel as it is possible to be and still remain human," he answered. "Yes, it is a sight to see them dance. Boileau said, long ago, after coming here, 'La joie y commence avec la vie et n'y finit qu'avec la mort.'"

"How happy!" she said, dreamily watching a lizard that was darting in and out on the opposite bank in the sunshine.

"Do you notice how melodious and soft is the language? There are so many vowels in each word, and numbers both begin and end with a vowel."

"I see," she assented; "like *arratsa*, 'night,' for instance, or *uria*, 'city.' What a number of things you know! Just like Uncle Dan. Nobody ever called him clever, and yet he knew something about everything you asked him. When we were first coming out here, I remember now so well, he actually had a number of extracts about this people and the Euscarra language copied out in his beloved old green manuscript-book. How delighted I was that day in the train when you told me those peasants were speaking it. Do you remember?"

"Yes."

A silence fell upon them. She was idly plaiting long grasses together, he was tracing a pattern with his stick in the sandy road; their thoughts were busy with that day,

and with all the years that had passed by since. Presently she said, musingly—

“There is a great difference between your life and mine. You have made yours, I have only lived the one that was made for me.”

“As falls to the lot of many women,” he replied.

“Not to Jessie; she has made her own also. I wish I had been poor once, as you were. It is difficult to understand other ways of living unless you have tried them. I suppose you lived in a very small house once, with quite a little garden?”

He thought of Byron Villa.

“We had a semi-detached house of six rooms, each about twelve feet square; we had sixty feet of back-yard; there was no garden.”

She fixed her eyes wonderingly on his face.

“Not so big as Jacob’s home; for he has a large loft, and a good big garden. Why, what a very extraordinary man you must be not to have gone mad in such a wretched

little place! Considering your tastes, I mean."

He laughed.

"People don't go mad so easily, and hundreds of men live as I lived. Looking back upon it, I am glad to have had the experience, though I thought it pretty rough on me at the time," he said.

"You would not like to go through it again, I expect, would you?"

"*Dios mio!* no indeed. Youth carries one over many a hard road, but in middle life——! God forbid that I should ever have again to make the experiment."

"I suppose it must be very terrible to be poor?" she said, watching the expression of his face, as the recollections of the past swept over it. "I learnt so much from Jessie. She has really seen life; I have only seen a small phase of it. I begin to think that there must be a whole army of girls—ladies, I mean, like me—who need my help, if I could only find them. Jessie must be the link between me and them, when I go back and take up my life again at Meads."

"Jessie is very practical," he said ; "she will never lead you into any weak philanthropy."

"Do you like the country?" she asked abruptly, after a long pause.

He pointed to Los Granados, with a smile.

"Need you ask?"

She laughed a happy, contented laugh. He seemed to see once more the girl, Sarah. From the old church tower the clock struck the hour of noon.

"Will you remain to lunch? Castora will be overjoyed."

"And Miss Thornborough?"

"Hopes you will do so if you can," she answered, smiling.

"I cannot to-day. But I am going to ask a favour of you."

"What is it?"

"I have a fancy for being with you once more in San Pascual. Will you allow me to drive you over some day?"

She met his earnest gaze with sudden sadness, and said wistfully—

"I should like to go. It is not nearly so far from here as from Bains, is it?"

"Not nearly," he said, rising. "It will take us about two hours to drive there, perhaps less."

She rose, too. Standing facing him, she said half absently, "You are very tall. I never noticed it before. Are you sure you want to go yourself, and are not merely doing it to please me?"

"Quite sure. Now, another thing. I am giving a little dance to all my Bains friends in the hotel next week; Mrs. Rose is my hostess. You will not care to dance, but will you come and look in for an hour? There will be some dances you have not seen before."

The colour mounted over her face. She raised her eyes to his reproachfully.

"I should not dream of coming. I wonder you should ask me, after all I said."

"And I wonder you should refuse, after all I have said. It would do you good," he urged. "You must make a beginning some time, you know. Tell me, how many people have you spoken to since you came to Los Granados, excepting the servants and a chance peasant or two? Mr. and Mrs. Rose

once, and I many times, have been your only visitors probably."

"I am sure you mean it most kindly, but I must say I do resent this perpetual attempt to arrange my actions for me. Pray give it up," said Miss Thornborough, suddenly, speaking in a voice of irritation.

He looked at her, amused, yet wholly sympathetic, entirely unruffled.

"Good-bye. Your tormentor is going for to-day. Drop him a line to say what day you will do him the honour to drive with him into Spain. Adios." And, lifting his cap, the blue cap of the people, he strode away down the road to fetch his horse from the care of Pedro.

Miss Thornborough returned slowly through the wood again, and entered the garden. Susan Frant was looking for her.

"Dear heart, Miss Sarah, I shall have you ill again if you go so long without food. Come in, my dear; your lunch has been waiting this quarter of an hour." And she began affectionately to help her mistress off with her jacket.

“Susan, should you say Mr. Hay was a domineering man, or not?” asked Miss Thornborough, while she submitted to these attentions.

The faithful woman looked sharply at her.

“I should say he was one who persevered at what he had set his mind upon till he got it, but one who was careful not to tread on other folk’s toes, for all his persevering.”

“Should you say he was a man who would be satisfied when he had got it, Susan, or think less of it just because he had got his own way?”

“He’s like most of us, values most what costs most, I expect. Still, if you want a true answer, I should say look at all this;” and Susan waved her hand over the house and garden. “He’s made the place, and made Castora’s life and her children’s, and they do tell me he has made all his money himself, through his own hard work. No; I shouldn’t say he was one of them see-saw kind o’ minds, up one day with his head in the clouds, down the next with his head

in the mire, till there's no passing an easy hour with him, let alone an easy life."

Miss Thornborough kissed her, for in these words she recognized the character of Susan's treacherous gardener.

"Susan dear, should you say I had a bad temper, if anybody asked you? Come, try and be honest."

Susan Frant considered.

"You always say just what you think, my dear; sometimes it hurts people's feelings. I should say you were a bit too proud at times, and lately, since you've been ill, you are a bit impatient, but then you've had a deal to try you."

Miss Thornborough laughed sadly.

"Very nicely worded, Susan. Anybody can extricate from your remarks that you think there is room for improvement in me."

"My dear, I would not for the world let it out to anybody else, but just to you, well, yes, I do think there is room for you to be a bit more patient with other folk's ways and words than you are now. But there, you would be perfect then, which it's against the Scriptures to expect of any of us."

CHAPTER III.

DURING the next few days Miss Thornborough was so silent that her servants thought she must be going to be ill again. One evening she was standing at the window watching the stars coming out in the sky, still lit by the glow of the sunset. The days were lengthening considerably ; the air was mild and balmy as midsummer. The great Judas tree in the garden shone crimson as a parting ray fell upon its flowers. The pleasant scent of burning wood filled the room. There was the tang-tang of cow-bells in the air ; it mingled with the murmur of voices from the kitchen.

Miss Thornborough turned round suddenly from the window and rang the bell. Pretty Brigitte answered it. Her cheeks were glow-

ing, a pink handkerchief was bound round her head, she wore her Sunday dress. She stood smiling in the doorway.

“Mademoiselle rang?”

“What have you been doing, Brigitte?”

“Ah, mademoiselle,” she cried, blushing, “Pedro and I were but showing Suzanne how we dance the fandango; some of our friends have stepped in to see my mother. Mademoiselle is not angry?”

“Oh dear, no,” answered Miss Thornborough. “Why should I be? Does Susan like it?”

“Oh yes. Suzanne finds it *triste* here sometimes. I like to amuse Suzanne. But mademoiselle rang?”

“Send Susan to me, and go on dancing, Brigitte, as long as you like,” she said, laughing.

Susan Frant came in.

“I am going into Bains at once. Tell George to bring round the pony-cart as soon as he can get it ready. You come too, Susan.”

“At this hour, my dear Miss Sarah?”

expostulated Susan, amazed at the old briskness that suddenly seemed to have returned to her young mistress.

“Yes. Never mind the time. I am going to look in at a dance at the hotel for an hour; we shall be back by ten o’clock.”

Susan Frant retired. She had heard, through George, who had been into Bains the day before, that Mr. Hay was giving a dance that night. It was the old impetuous manner come back again to her treasure, and she inwardly blessed Mr. Hay for having been able to rouse her.

Within half an hour the trio had started; they rattled along the road and over the wooden bridge, and jolted over the cobblestones into Bains.

The room at the hotel was very full, and around the doorways stood servants and friends of servants who had come to see the show. Susan and George Frant took up their station amongst them to wait till their mistress should be ready.

“Who is that girl in mourning, with the fair hair, who has just come in?” asked a

pretty Scotchwoman of her French neighbour, whose black-eyed daughter was the life of the dance.

“Mon Dieu! how droll you English are! She has come alone. It is a countrywoman of yours. She has taken Los Granados, the house of our good Monsieur Edouard in the mountains, you know. I do not know her name. See there, her man and her maid who wait for her by the door. They say she is enormously rich.”

“She moves like a queen,” said the first speaker. Ah, there is the new arrival of to-day gone over to speak to her. I suppose that is her attraction here to-night. Look, madame—you know every one—who is he?”

“It is the Capitaine. Ah, what is his name? Janion. That is it. My husband told me. Look at our good Monsieur Edouard; he is always so merry in the cotillion. See him now kneeling before my Marie. Ah, she has chosen him; they dance together. What a joy for a mother’s eyes!”

Mr. Hay had seen Miss Thornborough

come in, even while he took his place in the cotillion ; he had seen, too, that the Englishman who had only arrived at the hotel that day, had gone straight to her at once, as though they were old friends. Passing close to them in his waltz with the lively French girl, he caught Miss Thornborough's eye and smiled anxiously. Had she come to-night because of his request, or to see this new-comer, Captain Janion ? As soon as the final mad whirl of the dance ended, he brought back his laughing, panting partner to her mother, then turned to Miss Thornborough, who was sitting near with the Englishman.

She broke off what she was saying, and looking eagerly up in his face, cried meaningly—

“ I am here, you see. Are you satisfied ? ”

“ Partly,” he answered, taking her outstretched hand, and thinking, as he looked down on her fair, serious face, that if it should be a duel between the wits of himself and the man beside her, he was not going to resign her without some show of a fight.

Why should not this one good thing become his, and not any other man's ?

"You have a large gathering here to-night. Captain Janion expected to find an intelligent village, and here he is launched into the wildest dissipation of a city."

Then she introduced the two men. Mr. Hay found himself against his will taking a fancy to his enemy. A plain man, with an honest, cheerful face and an authoritative mien, some ten years his junior. They stood talking for some minutes. Many people had strolled away into the refreshment-room. Captain Janion turned to Miss Thornborough, and held out his arm.

"Come," he said, "you must be hungry after an eight-mile drive."

Mr. Hay could not be sure whether or not there was a moment's hesitation before she took his arm, and said wistfully, as they moved off together—

"Mr. Hay, have you forgotten San Pascual ?"

"No," he answered irritably, "but I thought you had."

She turned her head over her shoulder and glanced back at him.

"I never forget," she said gravely.

He stood looking after her.

How meaningless, suddenly, was the whole roomful of people to him—this jingle of the band, this buzz of many voices and languages, the gay dresses of this laughter-loving people! He had never before seen her in a crowd. It is so easy to be simple when you are out-of-doors, so infinitely difficult when you meet in a crowded room, he thought. He suddenly hated it all, and wished he had not asked her to come, and felt like a mountebank when, a few minutes after, he found himself at the refreshments, catering for bonbons for the black-eyed Marie.

Afterwards he saw her talking with Madame Rose; he went up and waited beside her.

They drew him into their conversation, then he said—

"It is ten o'clock. It is time you went back, unless you are remaining in Bains for the night."

"That is right, Mr. Hay ; somebody must take Miss Thornborough in hand. The air is cold at night still ; I have been telling her it was rash to come at all."

"I am ready to go now," said Miss Thornborough, bidding good night to Madame Rose.

Then he piloted her out through the crowd to the steps, where Susan Frant awaited her, and George and the pony-cart stood in the road.

She was graver even than usual, and said nothing.

"You are glad to have met an old friend ?" he asked in a troubled voice, as he wrapped her cloak round her.

"Yes ; he is a part of my old life, and his father has bought a place near to us," she replied.

"He does not seem to be fond of travelling," was Mr. Hay's next remark ; "he tells me he is not going on anywhere else."

"No," she said simply ; "he has come out here to see me."

"You were fortunate to hit off your meet-

ing to-night," he said drily, knowing he was guilty of an impertinence, and enjoying it.

But she did not seem to notice it. She went on musingly—

"I did not know he was coming out. He intended to come up to Los Granados to-morrow. I was as surprised as I was when I met you in the cemetery."

He believed her.

"Then you came to-night simply because I advised you to do so?" he asked in a low voice.

"Certainly," she replied. "Will you drive me to San Pascual to-morrow *morning*? I particularly want to go."

He noted her anxiety, so different from her eagerness or her apathy. He wondered. Aloud he said—

"Will you be ready to start at half-past nine? The morning is the best."

She nodded. "Yes, yes, I shall be quite ready."

Some one gently touched her arm.

"Oh, there you are. Good night, Captain Janion. Don't come up to Los Granados

till the afternoon to-morrow. I shall be out all the morning."

"All right," he answered. Then, going down to the pony-cart, he proceeded to arrange her rugs, saying, "Come, it is cold; let me wrap you up."

She got in and submitted to his careful attentions. Susan sat down beside her; he wrapped a rug over her also, saying cheerily, "Take care of her, Susan. I bring you no end of messages from Jacob, and from all your people. I will give you all the news of Meads to-morrow."

Miss Thornborough looked up at Mr. Hay as he stood on the top of the hotel steps watching them. The glare of lights and the sound of music streamed through the open door behind him; the light of the lamp shone full upon his face and upon hers. Their eyes met in a long, lingering look.

During their drive to San Pascual the next morning they hardly spoke. Once again they stood together in the great dark church. There, in that corner, ten years ago, the baby had been christened; here, by the

porch, she and he and her sister's children had stood while he explained the stained-glass window to her. Here at last she spoke again eagerly, even as she had spoken then, and eagerly he listened, trying to be resigned to the blow he knew was coming. The scent of incense lingered in the building. A few women absorbed in prayer were kneeling on the stones in the nave. A lamp burning on the great gilt altar cast a light over the mantilla-draped Madonna.

They stood in the stillness and looked into each other's eyes. She impetuously held out her hands as if for help; he took them in his.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Oh, I am so puzzled. Help me!" she cried.

"I will, always. Tell me everything."

"I wish he had not come out. I might surely have had these few weeks with you, after hoping so much that I should meet you again."

"You think he wants you to marry him? If you do not wish to do so, you can send him away," he said; but he felt his voice tremble.

She drew her hands out of his and turned round to the altar, so that he could not see her face.

"I have been engaged to him all this time," she said in a low voice.

There was such a long silence that she found herself obliged to break it, and went on in a monotonous whisper—

"My uncles liked him. He has always been all that is honourable and good and manly. He proposed to me just before my Uncle Dan died. I refused him. I could never have left Uncle Dan. He said he should wait. Directly I got better he came again. I had lost all I cared for. I liked him better than anybody I had ever seen. I accepted him on condition nobody was to know till I liked. The weeks went on, and at last I had to come out here. He has been very patient; I have only written once to him. Now he has come out to ask me to let it be made known, and to give him leave to go at once and tell my uncle, Sir Godolphin Leigh."

"Well, and do you not wish him to do so?" was all Mr. Hay could trust himself to say.

She made no reply.

He went to her, and put his hand on her arm.

"Do you love him?" he asked, looking searchingly into her face.

"I do not know," she said in a low voice.

"Then I cannot help you," he sadly cried.

"No one can ever help a person who does not know what they want themselves."

"I do know what I want," she murmured.

"Then be honest. Speak out. Why do you not say right out to him whatever it is you want to say? I am sure of one thing, that no decent man would want you to marry him while you were uncertain whether you cared about him or not," he declared with vehemence.

"I suppose not," she replied with dignity.

"This is strange conversation for a church. Suppose we go."

He followed her out into the porch; then, with a sudden impulse, she said—

"Leave me here a little while. I should like to be alone. Perhaps if I pray my duty may become clearer."

She turned back again into the dark church, and he idly wandered up the street to wait for her.

“What does she mean? Last night, as I stood on the steps, I could have sworn she cared about me. To-day there is no more feeling in her face than in that staring Madonna. How can I say anything to her if she means to marry that fellow? It is a poor trick to have played him, to have brought her away from him to-day. Why didn't I know?”

Thus reflecting, he strode impatiently about, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, getting more annoyed every minute at her position and his. After some time he came again to the church porch, and stood there waiting. After all, he thought, it was perfectly natural that she should already be engaged to be married. And yet—and yet, if she were satisfied, why did she so constantly remind him of a pent-up volcano? What lay beneath that dignified and calm, though sad, exterior? She was not in love with Captain Janion. He did not believe it.

He would find out during the drive back, even if she resented it for ever afterwards. "My God!" he groaned, "I can't give her up, I *won't* give her up. He pushed open the leather-covered door, and re-entered the church. He advanced up it; his eyes, growing accustomed to the darkness, peered into every corner. He could not see her anywhere. She must have gone outside to look for him. He retraced his steps. Perhaps she had gone to the inn where he had put up the pony-cart. He went there; it was time to be starting home again. She was nowhere to be seen. It was like her independent spirit to be taking a tour through San Pascual on her own account; still, he wished he had any idea where she was going to meet him. After wandering about for an hour, he went to a restaurant and had some lunch, and then began to be seriously uneasy. He wondered whether she had gone to the railway station and taken the train back. Then he reflected that there was no train till the late afternoon one. He went back to the inn, and to the church, and finally to the

station. Here he sat down to wait for the train to start; but she did not appear. In great anxiety he went out again, and crossed the square where, years before, they had stood together under the stars. The afternoon was drawing to a close. He came into a garden with a fountain in its midst and benches along its walks. There, calmly sitting on a bench near the fountain, was Miss Thornborough. She smiled sadly, and made room for him. He hurried up to her.

"Here I am, in the garden we sat in before. Do you remember? You have been looking for me. Never mind. Come, sit down. The hours have passed quickly. I knew we must drive by this garden gate to go back. I should have seen you pass."

"Are you aware that I have been searching for you for hours, and that Captain Janion is probably now waiting at Los Granados for you?" he cried reproachfully.

"I am not going to think of anything, except that you and I are sitting here alone together," she said. And, looking at her face, he thought he read in it the struggle of

this afternoon that she had chosen to spend alone. He saw that she had decided for self-sacrifice. "It will be so soon over, and we may never be together again," she added.

He struck the stones impatiently with his stick.

"And how do you propose to yourself to bear all the years of a union with a man whom I do not believe you care a straw for?" he demanded.

She looked startled. "I shall have strength. It is always given to those who are doing their duty."

"Is it your duty to tell a lie to an honest man?" he asked roughly.

"It is our duty not to break a promise."

"It is our duty not to make it carelessly," he asserted stubbornly.

"The sacrifice of self is not an unworthy one," she said in a trembling voice.

"Possibly, if you can ever manage to sacrifice only yourself. Generally one or two other people get immolated also. To my mind it is a sorry sight, and savours of vain-glory and the pleasing of self."

"You would sweep away all the stern virtues, and give me nothing in their place."

"Not so; I do but ask you to act honourably towards your fellow-man. The truth is always best in the long run. You would demand it for yourself. Why, then, offer anything less to another?" he implored.

"What is the truth in this matter? Do you know?" she asked, looking suddenly in his face.

"Yes, I know; and so do you. Only you are so full of the foolish pride of never making a mistake," he cried, in an agonized voice.

"Let us go," she said after a few minutes, getting up from the bench. "I am tired; I cannot fight any more. You tempt me by your words, but I must not let them bewilder me. I must stick to my promise."

"You shall not!" he said, following her. "If I never see your face again after to-day, which God forbid, I will not leave you alone till I have shown you the iniquity of what you propose to do."

They walked on rapidly towards the inn,

both of them in so great an agitation that they could scarcely collect themselves enough to pay the reckoning and mount and drive off. The promise of a hot summer was in the air; the mountains lay purple against the sky. The rays of the setting sun sought out the colour in everything around them; the slender trunks of the dark pines gleamed golden, the maize-stubble gleamed pale yellow. The blouses of boys driving cream-coloured oxen shone brilliant blue; the stems of the willows in the shallows shone red with rising sap. It was a brilliant evening, full of renewed life and warmth and colour. Overhead a flock of wild geese, in a long straggling line, flew slowly in the red sky, returning northward from Africa.

They drove through it all in silence, came to the frontier, halted, crossed it, and began to wind up the broad, lonely road to the table-land across which for some time their way would lay. The colour was dying out; now the mountains looked no longer purple, but lay black against the clear green sky. Not a living thing was in sight. Mr. Hay

let the reins hang idly, and turned to her once more.

Her face was set into lines of determination. She looked capable of making a great mistake, and of splendidly living it out. There was not a trace of weakness about her. He felt that the prospect of gaining happiness herself would be the one thing that would not have the slightest weight with her. He began to feel very desperate; every nerve in him seemed braced up to overrule her decision.

“Should a man ask a woman to marry him when she has told him that she is engaged to another man?” he said in a low voice.

She continued to stare at the mountains, but she did not answer. He went on—

“A man would say nothing if he thought she was happy. It would be his duty and his pride to swallow it all in silence. But, if she is not going to be happy, is she right in allowing him, too, to be sacrificed?”

“Ungenerous to talk to me alone up here, where I cannot escape from you,” she burst out.

"Let me be ungenerous, so that I save you from doing a great wrong. I tell you that marriage without love is a sin. You know it as well as I do. You shall not do it!"

"Oh, Uncle Dan! Uncle Dan! what shall I do? I wish you were here," she cried in bitterness.

"He would advise you, as I am advising, to be true to your heart, rather than to any Shibboleth, however excellent," he insisted with gentle sternness.

"Just think of that poor man coming by my own appointment, trusting me utterly! There he arrives this afternoon to find the girl who is engaged to him gone out for the day with another man."

"It has an ugly look, I confess," he said; "but people have broken their engagements before now, you know."

"*People* may have done so; our family keep their word. I suppose you would not have driven me here to-day if you had known about him, would you?" she added miserably.

"No, certainly not."

"Then I have put you into a false position too; I see I have," she bewailed.

He said nothing.

"He will be there when we get back. He is sure to wait. He will be anxious, and think something has happened to me."

"Tell him everything," he cried.

She turned round upon him impetuously.

"It is easy for you to urge me to give him up. He will be the loser, you the gainer."

Their eyes met. She saw all that her words admitted. Even in the gathering darkness, he saw the colour mount up all over her face.

"Oh, what have I said?" she gasped. "I ought not to have said that."

"Yes you ought," he replied eagerly, "if it is true. Only you do me wrong in thinking I am urging you from any motive except the one of saving you from making a mistake. The rest you and I can settle afterwards. You have taken the words that are waiting to be said to you out of my mouth. They are still unsaid by me, and will continue to be unsaid unless——"

"Unless what?" she asked breathlessly.

"Unless I find some day that you are free," he cried. "They would have no weight with you now."

"No, none," she replied, in a hardly audible whisper.

He thrust the reins into her hands and jumped down.

"Hold those," he said, in an altered voice. "How long do you suppose I shall be capable of sitting up there at your side and acting only as your father-confessor? I am going to lead the horse; it is getting dark."

"Light the lamps," she cried.

"I have no matches," he answered.

They proceeded for some distance in silence. There had been almost no twilight; the golden sunset had faded suddenly into darkness. Orion came out. A thousand stars began to twinkle above, and from all around came the sweet smell of dewy earth. They had come down from the table-land; they began slowly to mount the hill. The long line of poplars stretched out in front

of them up and down the hills ; they looked a high black wall in the darkness.

“ If only he drank or gambled it would be so much easier to send him away ; there would be a reason,” sighed Miss Thornborough from her seat.

Mr. Hay, in the road, guiding the horse in the darkness, made no answer.

“ How can you advise me to break my engagement, when it is just what you resented that girl doing to you years ago ? ” she demanded passionately. For he had once told her all about Flora Moore.

“ I have lived to be glad that she did so. She did me a less injury than marrying me would have been,” came back his answer from the road.

Miss Thornborough balanced herself carefully, then jumped down and came to his side.

“ I’m not going to sit up there any longer by myself,” she said.

They walked silently all the way up the hill, each only conscious of the presence of the other. There was not a sound to be

heard except the plodding steps of the horse. Darkness and stillness, black shadows and shapes, surrounded them. She heard a sigh, a mere breath in the still air. "Oh, esposa mia! Ah, sweetest eyes were ever seen!" he murmured to himself.

"I wish I had not been brought up to do my duty," she gasped, under her breath, "then I could send him away, and you and I—— But I am mad and foolish to say this while you walk stolidly on and never say a word."

Then Edward Hay abruptly stopped the horse, and, still holding the bridle with one hand, he laid the other heavily upon her arm, and said in a voice that trembled—

"Oh, Sarah Thornborough, if I spoke the words that my heart is bursting to speak, you would not be able to call me stolid. How thankful I should be if I could now get away from you till you have made up your mind which of us it is you love! But, as I have to be with you for the next half-hour, I entreat you to spare me. Climb up again and leave me to walk here by myself, and do

not break the silence, which you make the only thing possible between us two, so long as you have not sent him away, if indeed you intend to do so. Get up again, I beg of you, but do not torture me by walking and talking at my side."

And his heavy grasp half held her and half pushed her from him. She seized his arm and held it fast in both hers, trying to see his face in the darkness, and cried—

"You care for me like that? Then now I may tell you that that is how I care about you. Every minute I am not with you seems to me a wasted one, and to see your face and hear you talk gives me strength and makes me feel I do not ever want to be with any one else."

"And, with such thoughts as these about me, you can still contemplate marrying another man!" he cried hoarsely.

"I must," she gasped. "I come of a family who would die sooner than break their faith with another. I dare not."

"You would prefer to commit murder," he said heavily. "You will kill the best in

three lives—his, mine, and your own. But I have said all I could. Time alone can show you the right thing to do. Go, go; you can have no notion of what you are making me suffer;” and, shaking off her hand, he led the horse on again.

“We are told to work out our salvation in fear and trembling,” she said brokenly, as she continued to follow him.

“True, true; but you are making it, ‘What man hath joined together God Himself shall not put asunder.’ Leave me. I feel your sweet eyes through the darkness. I see your imploring face. I am only a man. Do not try me any longer. In mercy let me be.” Then, with a cry of relief, he added, “We are at the top of the hill. We will both get up again. There are the village lights; we are nearly home.”

“Nearly home!” she repeated impatiently. “Nearly home! That does not make it any better. *He* will be there.”

Bolt upright and miserable she sat beside him. He spoke no more.

Out came Captain Janion to the gate of

Los Granados, followed by the anxious Susan Frant and Castora.

"Thank goodness! Here you are at last. You are awfully late, but I hope you have had a jolly day. I was just thinking I must be getting back to Bains."

Miss Thornborough let him help her down.

"Good night, Mr. Hay," she said, holding out a shaking hand.

He did not take it. She saw in the lamplight that his face looked grey and altered.

"Good night. No, thank you, I will not come in," he said absently.

He turned to Pedro, and, ordering him to bring his horse down to the inn for him, he strode away. Captain Janion and Sarah Thornborough entered the house together.

After a long interview, Captain Janion went back to Bains, and from thence, the next day, to England. With agonizing regrets for the pain she caused him, Sarah Thornborough had given him up.

The next afternoon she went wandering alone up the hillside. When she came

down, Castora was standing crying in the gateway.

"Ah, mademoiselle, there you are at last ! My Monsieur Edouard has been here. He has just gone. He has had bad news. He returns to England at once. He asked for you, and then wrote a letter for you."

Sarah turned white, hurried in, and opened the letter. He wrote :—

"My uncle has had a stroke. A fearful fiasco in our firm, caused by our new partner, has taken place. I am probably ruined. I return to England at once. You are as free as though yesterday had never been. I have nothing, and am nothing. Your decision will now be easier. If there should ever be anything in which I can help you, ask me."

"Susan !" cried Miss Thornborough, sharply, up the stairs.

Susan Frant came running down.

"Our time is nearly up here. I shall not remain till the end. Pack up, please. We shall go home to Meads on Friday."

Towards evening she heard the church

bell ringing for service. A Mission was being held by the Curé of another village. He had a great reputation. Castora went to hear him every night. Miss Thornborough put on her hat, and, in the gathering darkness, went down through the village and entered the church.

This evening the service was for the dead, and no light was in the place except that from a vast pyramid in the centre of the nave, hung with black, and blazing with hundreds of candles, each sent in token of some dear departed. The church was thronged. The body of it was packed close with women; the three oaken galleries equally packed with the men. Away from the blazing pyramid, all was in gloom. Sarah Thornborough found an unoccupied chair, and, squeezing it close to the wall, she sat down. Everybody was in black.

"They pray for their dead," she thought. "I will pray to be like mine," and she fell on her knees.

Long she knelt there, thinking of Dan and Rachel Thornborough, of Gideon Leigh,

and of all her old life at Meads. All the indecision and anguish of the day before began to disappear, all her pride in her unbroken rectitude, her fear of making a mistake, and certainty that her own way was the best. She murmured to herself—

“A contrite heart,” Aunt Rachel said. “What a pity I cannot tell her that I understand—at last! I have been wrong in resenting Uncle Dan’s death. I have given my word and broken it; I have made a mistake and confessed it, and been forgiven. I love; I have suffered; I feel more like other people. I have been full of the pride of well-doing. The former things are passed away.”

They began to sing, that great concourse of fervent fisher-folk and husbandmen and shepherds, to their magnificent organ. Sarah bowed her head and listened, soothed.

“Battus par l’orage,
Nous crions vers vous;
Nous pardons courage,
Ah ! secourez-nous.”

PART VI.

THE FOOLISHNESS OF SARAH.

“Thou haft then the victory ; use it with virtue. Thy virtue wan me ; with virtue preserve me. Dost thou love me ? Keep me then still worthy to be loved.”

CHAPTER I.

"SALLY," said Sir Godolphin Leigh to his niece one day at Meads, soon after her return home—"Sally, you must get a new bailiff."

They were walking up and down the lawn together, and he stopped now and then to poke at a chance dandelion root left behind by the careful gardeners. His niece stopped beside him, holding her parasol over her shoulder with one hand, and smelling at a bunch of striped picotees which she held in the other. They had been up to see Jacob Frant, and the picotees were the spoils from his garden. Sir Godolphin Leigh was beginning to stoop, and his walk, owing to his gout, lacked some of its old briskness. But he was keener than ever about all that con-

cerned Sarah and the welfare of Meads, as he now regarded himself as her sole protector and adviser. He fidgeted at a tough refractory root, and finally tossed it into the air to some distance, with a grunt of satisfaction, then resumed his walk, and remarked once more—

“Yes, it is pretty clear to me that we must look out for somebody at once. Ben’s lad has good stuff in him, but he is too young to take the management yet. Poor Jacob, bless my soul, he’s as deaf as a post, and as bent as a willow wand.”

“He was very ill, I suppose, while I was away, wasn’t he, Uncle Dol?”

“I believe you, Sally. He held up till you were well abroad, but poor Dan’s death has taken all the spirit out of him. Eh? What? He isn’t good for much now, but to potter about in the sunshine, and maybe keep an eye on the poultry. The question is, who can you have?”

“Ah, that is just the point,” said his niece, calmly.

“You see, Sally, what you need is a

husband, and what Meads wants is a master."

"That is just what I think too, Uncle Dol."

"It must be lonely for you here, my dear, all the long evenings, and the days when nobody happens to call. When are the Meakin lot coming to you?"

"Not till August. Mabel said they could all come if she waited till the children's holidays, and Percy will take his holiday then also. He is going to Scotland, but will join us here for the last part of his time. I shall like to have the whole batch together for once." Then she added to herself, "It may be all different by next year."

"Bless me, child, to think of the Thornboroughs having dwindled down to just you! For of course I don't count that flimsy Meakin breed."

"You can't do away with the fact that Mabel is my sister," said Sarah, laughing.

"Look at those," returned Sir Godolphin, pointing with his stick to a plume of tall lilies and a bed of candytuft beside it; "they're both of 'em flowers, and both of

'em white. Naught else alike about 'em. One's you and one's Mabel. Don't let me catch you wanting to marry a little, neat chap like Percy. My notions have had to change during the last twenty years, and I could wish you could have fancied Janion, my dear. Dan and I thought very well of him."

"So did I. He is a chivalrous gentleman, only I did not happen to love him," she said sadly.

"Bless me, Sally, what more did you want? You admired and respected him. You won't be falling in love now, like a maid of sixteen. You are no chicken now, remember."

"I know," said Sarah, quietly.

"Don't, child! Don't answer me like that. I cannot bear to see you tame, with your claws pared and your wings clipped. Eh?"

Sarah laughed gently, and tucked her hand through his arm.

"Come up and sit on the terrace with me, and I will tell you a secret. Only you must not scold me."

He looked pleased. He knew that his brother-in-law had always had every confidence of Sarah's, and often he wished he could in some measure fill his place to her.

"I won't scold, my maid," he said, as they seated themselves. "Tell away. I have not got Dan's gift of wisdom, but what little I have, God bless me, I hope I can scrape together and give you the benefit of."

A pause followed, in which Sarah was pondering how to begin. At last she said quietly, with a smile playing round her mouth and dancing in her eyes—

"The fact is, Uncle Dol dear, that I have chosen a new bailiff, and also a husband."

"Eh? What?" he cried, thinking she was joking.

"I have. The only thing is that I have not offered him the situation yet, and I don't know whether he will take it."

"Him! There are two men, aren't there?"

"No, only one. The only man who shall ever help me manage Meads is the only man I shall ever marry."

Her uncle chuckled.

"Eh? Dare-devil Sally once more! I like to hear her. Go on, child. Who is he, and what is he?"

Sarah's gaze travelled thoughtfully across the lawn towards the blossoming chestnuts in the field; she was re-reading the words in Mr. Hay's letter—"I am nothing, and I have nothing." How could she explain to Uncle Dol? Uncle Dan would have understood in a moment.

She turned to the affectionate and impatient old man at her side, and told him all the bare facts of Mr. Hay's life, ending by saying—

"And so, you see, he is an admirable man of business, and well fitted to help me. He has no land of his own to be pining after, so he won't mind living here."

Sir Godolphin Leigh was nearly choking with surprise and disappointment.

"*Mind*, indeed! *Mind* living at Meads! I should like to see the man who would *mind*. God bless my soul, Sally, you've been taken in, just as I told poor Dan

you would be. Taken in by a fortune-hunter."

Sarah's face flamed.

"He is not!" she cried hotly. "That is just it. It is much more difficult to accept a favour than to bestow one. He will think Meads a great barrier. I do not believe he will marry me, not if I went down on my knees to him."

"Then he's a booby if he wouldn't," returned her uncle, inconsistently, secretly admiring her fair, angry face. "A precious booby, I'll go bail. Made love to you while he had a few paltry hundreds of his own, and then throws you over in a fit of sentimental anger because he loses them. Eh? What? Let the fellow go, Sally; it's sheer foolishness to throw good thoughts after bad. 'Tis a misfortune you ever met him."

"No; it was the most fortunate moment in my life," she cried. "Now, look here, Uncle Dol; you make any inquiries you like about him. His uncle knew Uncle Dan, and you can go up to Lawson's and ask all about him from a business point of view.

And as for the rest, I know he visits at several houses Aunt Mary goes to in town."

"Pooh! what's the visiting got to do with it? People will invite any ass covered with gold nowadays, while your horse with a pack-saddle may go hang. No; I'll have a word or two with Lawson, and your aunt shall write to her brother in Devonshire and inquire about those Moores. You say his sister married Moore, the present Vicar there? Bless my soul, Sally, what a heap of trouble you give! Mind, I'll do it just to satisfy myself, but I hope you will have the good sense to leave the fellow alone."

Sarah smiled happily. Her uncle saw it.

"Why, child, eh, you don't mean to tell me that you are *in love* with the fellow?" he cried testily.

"Yes I am, out and out, over head and ears! Why, Uncle Dol, did you ever know me talk so much about any man before? And didn't I begin by saying I was going to tell you a secret? And you must not tell, you know, because he may refuse to marry me, which would be awkward for

me, if it got about the neighbourhood, you see."

There was a mischievous twinkle in their eyes as they looked at each other. Sir Godolphin Leigh chuckled.

"Brother to that bit of a thing who nursed you! It is a queer set-out altogether. Well, your aunt thought her an uncommonly knowing body. We live in most surprising days. Monstrous queer! If anybody had told me that the heiress of Meads would have spliced herself to the brother of her sick-nurse, I'd not have believed it."

"Put it the other way, and say that Mr. Hay-Thornborough's sister had the grit to make a career for herself, rather than be a burden to him," cried Sarah, with spirit.

"Hay - Thornborough!" repeated Sir Godolphin, musingly. "It don't sound so bad, Sally. What's his name, child?"

"Edward," she replied softly.

"And a good, plain, common-sense name too. Well, well, we shall see. 'Tis a risky game to be playing. Remember, Sally, I tell you 'tis sheer foolishness to try it."

"I shall remember. I shall never hold you responsible, if my wishes come to nothing. But that won't happen, Uncle Dol dear. You will see."

He patted her shoulder kindly.

"Good maid! you have kept a corner for your old uncle, in spite of giving all your heart to this good-looking adventurer. He *is* good-looking, I suppose. They always are. Eh? What?"

"I don't know," she replied, laughing. "I never thought about it. He is very grave, generally, and has kind brown eyes, and his hair is getting rather grey."

"Eh?" grunted Sir Godolphin. "Grey and grave and penniless! A monstrous deal to recommend him, I must say. There, there, Sally, have your fling, but you'll live to be disappointed in him."

"Never, you bad old man!" she cried, kissing him. "I see the Howards' carriage coming up the avenue. Come in and help me to entertain them. You have been very good to listen so long. Here, let me put this picotee in your button-hole."

When her visitors had left, and Sir Godolphin Leigh had driven home to his dinner, Sarah Thornborough began to wander through the old silent house, seeing each familiar room afresh with the eyes of Mr. Hay. Now that she thought of him as her companion, her wanderings over her domain were no longer restless and miserably lonely; her mind was no longer full of a passion of remorse for the multitude of attentions she meant to have paid to those departed, full of rebellion against the fate that had left her here last of her name.

She looked at the portraits in the dining-room, and was glad that they were her ancestors. She recognized now that she herself was the image of her grandfather, that stern Gideon Thornborough of whom her uncle Dan had always spoken with respect, but never with affection. She thought what a pity it was that his brother, the fair boy in brown suit with brass buttons and broad frilled collar, had not lived to man's estate, and that, of his two cropped-headed sisters in the straight white frocks and red-leather

shoes, one had married a Colonial Bishop, and her children had remained abroad, the other had died unmarried. Sarah began to think that it would have been rather nice to have had a few more living relatives. All this great roomful of people had been born, had lived, and most of them had died at Meads. She looked at the picture of herself and Gideon, when they were children, taken standing hand in hand, with the ivy-covered house as their background. She knew she was supposed to be holding birds'-eggs in her pinafore, while Gideon's other hand grasped the ladder leaning against the house. Old Jacob had once told her the story of their childish escapade.

She went into the drawing-room, and thought that Mr. Hay, who had collected such curious and beautiful things himself, would certainly be interested in its high-backed chairs, with ears of wheat painted on the black ground of the backs, in the candlesticks and boxes of Battersea enamel, the figures of Chelsea and Bow, the cabinets of sandal-wood and of tortoise-shell, the harp,

the old spinet, and the tables of amboyna and satin-wood.

When she reached the library she stood looking at the book-cases. Here was the old calf-bound Milton out of which she and Gideon had learned their "Lycidas," with its "Critique by Mr. Addison," its lines on "Paradise Lost," by Mr. Andrew Marvel, and its woodcut of Satan, who, in sandals, short clothes, and shield, awkwardly displacing his wings, stood in a cave haranguing other persons in armour and wings, amidst flames and black rocks. Sarah could hear once more her uncle's voice reciting Mr. Marvel's words—

"Where could'st thou words of such a compass find?
Whence furnish such a vast expanse of mind?
Just Heav'n thee, like Tiresias, to requite,
Rewards with prophecy thy loss of sight."

Here was "Conference of Monsieur Le Brun, Chief Painter to the French King, 1701." How familiar to her was each drawing of the "Mixed Passions"! How fond Gideon had been of imitating "Laughter"! whereas "Rage" had been her favourite.

Here was the "Virgil," with its licence from George II. to "Our well-beloved Joseph Davidson, of Our City of London, Bookseller," for the sole printing and publishing of the works of Horace and Virgil, "and all the other Latin Authors," "for the Term of Fourteen Years," "given at Our Court at St. James's, 1741-2." Here was "Fables of the late Mr. Gay," with its dedication "To his Highness William Duke of Cumberland." She knew the look of every woodcut. How Jacob used to laugh at the lines when she repeated to him "The Owl and the Farmer"!—

"The farmer laugh'd, and thus reply'd,
'Thou dull important lump of pride!'"

Then her eye fell upon the fine little red morocco "Rasselas;" the venerable "Breeches" Bible, where was to be read, since the days of Queen Elizabeth, "and they sewed figge leaues together, and made themselves breeches." While bound at the end was, "The whole Booke of Pfalmes, by Thomas Sternhold, John Hopkins, and others, . . . with apt Notes to sing them

withall. . . . ‘ If anie be afflicted, let him praie ; if anie be merie, let him fing Pfalmes.’ ”

How carefully Aunt Rachel had instructed her out of “ The Book of Trades,” with the quaint pictures and terse, accurate information about “ The Iron Founder,” “ The Glass Blower,” “ The Chemist,” and many others ! Amidst the shoal of modern literature for children, on which Mabel’s infants were regaled, was there anything more instructive, bracing, or entrancing than “ The History of Theophilus and Sophia,” “ The Infant’s Progress,” “ A Drive in the Coach through the Streets of London,” and “ The Naturalist’s Pocket Magazine ” ? “ And yet,” she remembered, as she slowly ascended the stone staircase,—“ and yet Mabel and Percy said they should sell up the whole of Meads if it had been left to them, and furnish a new house in town. They say they prefer having no articles of any sort that have ‘ musty traditions ’ attached to them. Whereas I always feel as though I were living in the showroom of a shop when I stay with them. I suppose I look to them as antiquated, a

survival of bygone days, as my belongings, fit only to be kept on a shelf as a curiosity."

Upstairs in the blue room all was covered in white sheets, under Susan Frant's careful reign, yet here could be seen the coloured print of "Adelaide, North Terrace." This was a vast tract of trees and mountains, with a cleared space in the foreground, showing neat rows of some hundred wooden houses, a tiny church on the open grass plot, and a wooden cart drawn by bullocks standing by the river's grassy banks. A great-uncle had sent this print to Meads to show them that comparatively unexplored country, Australia. Here were the silver snuffers and tray, and here hung the bright copper warming-pan, with the peacocks engraved on the lid, kept here, instead of below-stairs, ever since some autocratic decision of her grandmother, Mary Thornborough.

Lastly, she wandered into the old state bed-chamber, and sat down beside the mahogany four-post bed, and fell into a reverie. How many Thornboroughs had brought their brides home here! How many babies

had been born here ! How many heads of the house had ended their days here, and passed peacefully away ! The windows looked towards the sun-rising and towards the south ; they stood open now, and the peacock was sitting in the yew tree, which spread its branches almost up to the east window. The south window had a broad window-seat, painted a deep cream colour ; on it, in the corner, lay the little pile of devotional books which every Thornborough had made use of as they succeeded to that room.

Then Sarah again perused the familiar verses, that, printed in clear black letters and framed in black wood, had for generations hung side by side over the high mantelpiece—

“ That our sonnes may be as the plants
Whome growing youth doth reare,
Our daughters as carved corner stoncs
Like to a pallace faire.
Our garners full and plenty may
With fundrie forts be found,
Our sheepe bring thousands in our streetes,
Ten thousand may abound.”

“ Man walketh like a shade, and doth
In vaine himselfe annoy
In getting goods, and cannot tell
Who shall the same enjoy.

Now, Lord, fith thinges this wife do frame,
What helpe doe I desire?
Of truth my helpe doth hang on Thee,
I nothing else require."

Sarah smoothed the bed reverently with her hand, and leaned her cheek against the post and thought of Dan Thornborough. Here had he come alone uncomplainingly, and lain himself down to meet his future. What had he thought of as he lay down? Had he called her to come to him? Had he good-byes to say, or orders to give, or a final conjecture to make about what lay before him? No one would ever know now what had occupied his thoughts on that last evening. He had lived his life honourably and cheerfully, and taught her to do the same, and had then gone unto his own place, an old man, and full of years—his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.

"This was his room. Here he may have sat and mourned over the loss of his promised wife; here prayed many a prayer for the guidance of Gideon and me; here passed many an hour of struggle and worry

and loneliness, and yet he was always the same downstairs amongst us all. This room is indeed sacred," she thought. "Who am I bringing here to rule after him, after them—to rule in such different days? For there is a greater difference between my day and Uncle Dan's than between his day and that of my great-great-grandfather, I should think. It all rests with me. I choose not a husband only, but a ruler over many people and interests, a dispenser of a large sum of money, a father to the Thornboroughs yet to come. There is no one to consult with. Is it possible for me to choose unwisely? *He* told me to follow my own heart. After all it is the heart that Uncle Dan trained and made; it *cannot* go wrong. Oh, Edward Hay, it turns to you; it tells me that you were born to come after him. All the voices of my house rise up out of the Past round me to-night and say, 'Choose him. He is suitable and worthy to follow us.'"

Then, mingling with the voices out of the Past, was another voice, murmuring, under a warm, starlit sky, "Ah, sweetest eyes were

ever seen ! Oh, esposa mia !” “ He has lost everything that he worked so hard for. I will give him all that I have. He will value Meads as I value it.” She spread her arms out over the bed, and, slipping on to her knees, laid her face down on the coverlet. She prayed.

During the weeks that followed, Miss Thornborough’s time was fully occupied with correspondence of all sorts, with accounts, leases, charities, with interviewing lawyers and tenants, with going the round of the farms in her new capacity as “landlord,” in returning many a call of sympathy and kindness. One morning, among the number of letters and circulars in her post-bag, she drew out one from Jessie Hay. She propped it up against the silver urn in front of her, and proceeded to read it in the leisure of her lonely breakfast. Part of it ran—

“And so at last my dream has come to pass—of becoming a trained parish nurse for the poor ? I have formally written to accept the offer of the committee, of which I see you are one, and the one who (I read

between the lines) has started the idea in your town, and nominated me for the post. You who have been able to live all your life like a limpet on its own rock, can form but a small idea of all that you have put me in the way of getting. The rolling stone will roll no longer, the drifting boat now will cast anchor for good and all. Once more I shall have a home, and home in the most comfortable sense for a poor and unmarried woman. I shall be tethered in a community of children, and find my work ready-made, within walking distance all around me. What clever spirit possessed you to assign me rooms in the Thornborough Orphanage, and so save me from my nightmare of perpetual lodgings, with the perennial mutton chop and boiled egg? I saw my brother for an hour when I passed through London. Thank you for your note of kind sympathy about the smash-up of his business. Perhaps you saw in the papers that the rascal who had caused all the mischief has shot himself. My uncle has just died. I do not apologize for troubling you with my affairs, for it is a

relief to me to talk to one so sympathetic as yourself. My brother told me his agent had been fortunate enough to sell Los Granados. I am afraid I should have stuck to it; but he considered he owed all he had to the creditors. I think he feels the loss of that place more than the ruin of his business. My sisters have told me it was a very charming place. I wish now that I had seen it. . . .”

Miss Thornborough finished the letter, and went on with her breakfast, thinking. Then she withdrew to the library and her writing-table, carrying with her the mass of correspondence, which, from the shape of the envelopes, promised to be merely of a business nature. She looked over them rapidly, tossing circulars, notices, advertisements, into the waste-paper basket, laying aside in a pile the important letters to be answered presently. Nearly at the bottom of the collection was a long blue envelope. “At last! Well, I *am* glad!” she cried, tearing it open. She looked over the contents lovingly; a smile, which suddenly illumined mere vigour and purity of

outline into a warm beauty, spread over her face, and lingered there for a moment or two, as she sat staring on the enclosure, and through it away at something infinitely satisfactory, which it seemed to show her. Then she got up, letting all the rest of the papers fall from her lap on to the floor, and, with a huge sigh of content, said aloud, "Now I shall do it." Then swiftly she went away, down the long passage to the workroom.

Miss Thornborough's habits were methodical; the kitchen was always the first place she visited after breakfast, and Susan turned round from the cutting out of work for her mistress' various charities, saying, in an astonished voice—

"My dear, you here already? Is anything the matter in your letters or is it only the newspapers?"

"Unfeeling woman! I believe an empire in ruins, or a theatre full of people burnt to death, would matter less to you than if I had a finger ache." The good woman smiled. "No, Susan, there is nothing the matter, only I have been reading that the missing

heir to a kingdom is found, and his coronation will take place shortly."

"Oh! One of them foreign quarrelsome places, I suppose, my dear. Most of them foreigners are ready enough to be made kings. It isn't often a king gets mislaid, as you may say; they're mostly only too handy, and a deal of ill-will goes on between them, as I've heard Uncle Jacob say."

"Well, this man never caused ill-will in his life. He is going to marry the queen, and they will live happy ever after, as the fairy-tale kings and queens do."

"How you do run on, my dear!" said Susan Frant.

Her mistress had gone behind her, and was sitting upon the low sill of the open window, so she could not see the smile that again covered her face.

"I am going up to stay with Mrs. Meakin, the day after to-morrow, Susan. I shall be away two nights. Please pack our things to-day, and leave Kate plenty of this sewing to do while we are gone."

"There's nothing the matter with the

children, is there?" demanded Susan, anxiously.

Miss Thornborough laughed joyously.

"Can't you think of something nice happening for a change? You are always on the look-out now for some trouble."

Susan Frant's scissors went snip-snap methodically, while she cut the full length of her stuff through. Then she proceeded carefully to pin widths together. Miss Thornborough spoke again—

"Susan, Jacob's gift of prophecy has not descended upon you. Do you ever flatter yourself it has?"

"What do you mean now, I should like to know, my dear?"

"Years ago you told me that a man would be more likely to love me than I to love him. Well, you are wrong."

Susan Frant turned round sharply, and fell back into the remonstrating tones of her young days.

"Who is he, Miss Sarah?"

"I did not say he was anybody," said Miss Thornborough, ungrammatically; "I

merely informed you that I had discovered myself capable of having a shred of affection for those unhappy beings who have not had the luck to be born Thornboroughs or Leighs or Frants. There, there, I must be off to the kitchen. I like talking riddles to you, because you never guess the answers till I tell you you may."

Susan Frant looked after her up the long passage, then returned to her work, nodding her head, a shrewd look on her face.

"It's him; I do believe it's him. I don't take to stranger folks, but then, as Uncle Jacob said, when I told him^t what I suspected, 'The stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you . . . ye shall not vex him.' My lamb. There, he's one of our sort, I do think, though he don't come from these parts. And that Nurse Jessie, too! Yes, I do think she will make her a good sister. But no man, not the best of 'em, could come near what Gideon would have been by now, if it had pleased the Lord to spare him. Well, they do say we choose different at thirty to what we do at twenty.

And if Mr. Hay is graver than I could wish, why, so is Sarah, and maybe they'll cheer each other up."

A few days after this, Mr. Hay was walking restlessly up and down the sitting-room of his London lodgings, late on the hot summer afternoon. Outside, in the parched square, it was fairly quiet, but through the open windows came the roar of the traffic from the adjacent main thoroughfare. The fashionable world had left town, and even the semi-fashionable had been for the past week on the move. The air was thick and sultry, as well as hot. The trees in the square were distinctly turning brown. Everything in the room looked dusty and faded; the table was covered with papers, tossed in confusion; the torn horse-hair chairs were piled with books. Mr. Hay had sold all his furniture in the first-floor rooms, which for years he had occupied, and had moved upstairs into his landlady's furnished apartments, in spite of her protests that they were not nearly good enough for him. He looked white and fagged, "utterly played out," as

Felix Harding had told him that morning. "Lawsons" had taken the clever young clerk into their service. "I shall only stay with them till you want me again, mind," he declared hopefully to his late chief.

It was not the affairs of his Firm that now occupied the thoughts of Mr. Hay in his restless walk. He drew a letter from his pocket, re-read it, and thrust it nervously back again. The letter consisted only of the words, "Please be at your rooms at half-past five to-morrow. I am coming to see you." There was no address, so he was unable to put off the writer. He knew the clear handwriting. What was it all going to mean?

"How like her to come to me! She was afraid, even if she asked me, that I would not go to her," he thought, with a sigh. "How could I? What right have I? And this room is not fit for her to come into. It is as bad as Byron Villa again."

He heard a knock at the house door. He turned cold. He had never known what it was to feel ill, but he suddenly was con-

scious what a strain the past months had been upon him. He stood with hungry eyes fixed upon the door that would so soon open and show her to him once more.

His landlady ushered her into the room, bestowing an interested look upon them both as she shut the door. Miss Thornborough came towards him with outstretched hands; her fair hair was in a curly knot behind, and curly rings came out on her forehead from beneath her hat. She wore a black dress, but it was trimmed with something that gave him the impression of her sparkling all over, from the glad light in her shining eyes down to the hem of her robe. She held in her hand a long blue envelope.

"How good of you to be at home!" she cried. "And how nice it is to see you again!"

He took her hands in his that trembled, and murmured something; he knew not what.

"Let us sit down," she went on, marking in an instant how tired he looked.

They sat down beside the untidy table.

"First, I want to say how sorry I was to hear about all your troubles. Secondly, I want to know what you are going to do?"

He searched on the table, and handed her a letter.

"I have received that offer from a house in New York. It will keep me in bread and cheese," he said.

She looked through it.

"A good offer, is it not?" she asked.

"Yes, as times go, very good."

"Have you accepted it?"

"I am going to do so to-night," he answered wearily. Then he roused himself. "But do let me thank you for obtaining that post for my sister Jessie. You have made her immeasurably happy."

"I am so glad. I wanted her near me, you know. I told you at Los Granados that Jessie and I were friends."

"I remember," he said. "Poor old Los Granados! I have sold it, you know."

"Yes, I heard so. I love every foot of it."

"Did you?" he asked sadly. "Then

I am the more sorry it had to go. But the purchaser must be intelligent, for I hear he has taken it just as it stood—furniture, and my small collection, and the garden stuff, and all.”

“You had put so much thought into it, had you not?” she said gently; but there began to be a tremor in her voice.

He clasped his hands together and leaned forward, his arms resting on his knees, saying, as though he had forgotten her presence and it were a relief to think aloud, “It was the dream of my boyhood to have a little place of my own. I came, a tolerably wretched sort of fellow, to that spot among the very race of people I had wanted to know. I found Castora. It made me happy to think there was somebody I could help. There was the house, in, as you have seen, a situation enticing beyond words. I bought it; I filled it, year by year, with every beautiful thing I could pick up, and, as time went on, I looked around my house and garden thinking that some day, when I should meet her, I should give it all, as my wedding-

gift, to the woman whom I loved. Many people have come out there with me and found rest and health, and regained their beliefs in the good of living. Los Granados has readjusted many a mind out of balance, out of touch with its human kind. I got more and more fond of it. Sometimes I used to think of you, bright and honest and full of laughter, as I first saw you, and used to say to myself that no doubt you were married long ago, but that I should like my wife to be like you. Then you came. Then I found that it had been your uncle who, years before, had casually spoken the words which had renewed self-respect in me when in that particular week I had been ready to curse God and die. You seemed to me to be the woman I had been waiting for, and I made up my mind to win you if I could. You are bound up, in my thoughts, with my mountains, my garden, my home. You, unconsciously, cared the most for the very things I did; you used often to pick up my pet purchase and say as reverently as I did, 'How beautiful!'

You have often stood in my garden, on my chosen spot, and been silent, as many a time I have been, at the immensity of the beauty of the country spread out before you. It was yours, all yours. It was the one thing I had to give which was worth your acceptance, you who already owned so much, and could purchase anything you liked. But you could not purchase Los Granados, for there was not another. It was made out of my heart, it was adorned with my fancy, it became glorified by your coming to it."

He paused, drew his hand over his brow, as though to obliterate all past recollections; then he spoke again, in a dull and ordinary voice, out of which all the passion had died. "But that is all over now. It belongs to strangers. Castora must find a new situation, and Brigitte must go without the dowry I promised. Pray forgive my indulging in this retrospect. The sight of you carried me away. My dreams have faded into the light of common day. I am beginning the world again, and, luckily, there is plenty of work

left in me yet," he added, leaning back at last and looking at her.

"What an odd man you are!" she said in a low voice, earnestly meeting his gaze, into which he had suddenly thrown nothing but coldness and conventionality.

"Why so?" he asked, amused, in spite of his sadness, at her abruptness.

"Let me try and plead with you as you once pleaded with me. To begin with. Should a man tell a woman she is the dream of his life, and that he loves her beyond measure—should he tell her all this unless he intends to ask her to marry him?"

He started.

"Forgive me," he cried, "I was thinking aloud, as a man does perhaps once in a lifetime, and then only to a woman——"

"Who loves him," she put in softly.

"Hush!" he said, "you are so generous, so impulsive; but I must not take advantage of you. Why did you seek me out here? You have unmanned me. I had no business to speak as I did just now to you."

"Why not, pray?" she demanded.

"Cannot you see that I have nothing to offer you left in the world? That a ruined, broken-down man cannot ask any one, least of all a wealthy woman, to be his wife? I am no fortune-hunter."

"Just what I said to my uncle."

"How do you mean?" he asked sharply.

"He told me I should be taken in by a mere fortune-hunter, and I told him you were not," she said calmly.

He got up and began his restless walk again.

"Of course. That is how it would look to any one less generous than yourself," he said irritably.

"You should follow the leading of your own heart, instead of any Shibboleth, however excellent," she cried, looking yearningly, yet mischievously at him.

He stopped a moment in his walk and smiled sadly.

"I remember telling you that," he said. "I wonder you stood so much hectoring from me."

"You were quite right. I was then in a false position, and you exhorted me to struggle

out of it? I took your advice. Why will you not take mine?"

He made no reply, but continued his restless walk. Miss Thornborough, leaning back in her chair, watched him anxiously.

"I am very solitary," she said presently. "If I did not know that we loved each other, I should just accept my loneliness as my lot, and live on at Meads doing my best, and perhaps some day I should find some one whom I could feel I could marry. But, as it is now, I bear but impatiently the solitude, knowing that it is for ever impossible that I should care for anybody but you, knowing that you have the same feeling, and yet that you will not come to me. So of course I am worse off than if I had never seen you."

He stopped near her, leaning his elbow on the mantelshelf and looking down on her eager face. He was twisting the chain of his watch nervously; his forehead was contracted into a frown.

"Is that so?" he said in a low voice.

"Have you conjured up for me an army of relations?" she asked, smiling up at him.

"Cannot you yet comprehend all that it means when I say, 'I am lonely'? A great wide house, in the middle of fields and farms, with just only me tucked away in the corner of it. Even my friends cannot run in and out as people are able to do in London, distances are too great. It is not lonely for the servants, of course; there are so many of their own position in and about the place. I suppose a man does not picture things that he does not see, so easily as a woman does. Now, Jessie seemed to understand directly. I suppose men see with their eyes only, and girls see with their minds as well. Why do you look so amused?"

"Because I am thinking what dense, blundering creatures we must often appear to you."

"I have not known intimately a great many men," she replied thoughtfully; "from among them Fred Leigh is the only one who has seemed to me to be really blundering. And just at present *you* seem to me to be dense. But, then, I think you are purposely so," she added.

"It is better that I should be," he said in a low voice, turning very pale, and frowning more than ever.

Miss Thornborough got up from her chair.

"Then I suppose I am to understand that it is time I left," she said, with even more stateliness about her than he had ever before noticed.

"Yes; I suppose it must be all or nothing; a parting to-day for ever, or——" he paused.

They stood opposite to one another. His face was worn and agonized, his eyes looked yearningly into hers.

"Or—what?" she asked gently.

He made a movement towards her, drew back again, then motioned her towards the door.

"Go, please," he managed to say.

"It is a struggle between Love and Pride," she said, and all her sweet voice was full of caressing affection. "I am a woman, so of course I forgot to be proud, or I should never have come here to-day. You are a man, so of course your pride is more to you. But if you cannot forget it, you will make me

feel I have made a mistake in coming to you, and then perhaps *I* shall also learn what wounded pride means."

"My dear, my dear," he murmured, "you do not know what will be said. I am years older than you. I must not let you do it."

"Ah, what is the use of admiring the power of love in poems, if we are not capable of it ourselves?" she cried. "There is no one who can help me so well as you could. I should feel almost as if I had Uncle Dan back again, if you were with me at Meads. It is so silent there now. It is so difficult to look upon a house as *home*, when it is only peopled by memories. You think so, too, I know. And you know you will be miserable—will you not?—when you find yourself in New York, all alone, and look back and think how happy we might have been together."

He shuddered. A long pause followed, during which he remained with his elbow leaning on the mantelpiece and his face covered with his hand.

"Do you suppose I have not had my

dreams too, about you?" she said at last in a low voice. Then slowly she took up the blue letter she had brought with her, and suddenly was seized with shyness, as she held it out to him, saying, "I meant to give you this when we should have settled things between us, but, as it seems so difficult to make you understand, perhaps you had better look at it now."

Then she hurriedly turned away to the window, with her back to him.

He dropped wearily into a chair, and drew out a lawyer's letter. It was wrapped in a sheet of notepaper, across which he read, in her writing, "Sarah's marriage gift to Edward." Then he read the letter. It was she who had bought Los Granados. This was her gift to him.

Long did Sarah Thornborough stand at that window, while silence reigned in the room behind her. The slow moments passed. Was he convinced, or annoyed, or tenderly pleased, but obdurate as ever? But if he were at last comprehending how she loved him, then let this moment of

ecstasy last and last. The Thornborough habit of decorous waiting upon the feelings of other people was strong upon her. She remained motionless, her hands hanging clasped before her, her dancing blue eyes full of tears, her mouth quivering with hope, with laughter, with uncertainty. What would Mabel say if she ever came to know of her visit here? And Uncle Dol? Well, nobody should ever know. But there was the bell of the gloomy church close by striking the hour. She must hasten back, or she would be late for dinner, a great crime in the Meakin household. Well, let the time go. What did anything in the whole universe matter to-night, so long as that one harassed, struggling man, would consent to let her make him happy?

The rays of the setting sun began to slant over the treetops in the square straight in her face. She moved slightly to avoid them. Then at last came a sound from the other side of the room.

“*Sarah!*”

She turned round, her fair face alight with

eagerness. He was sitting where she had left him. His hand hung over the arm of the chair ; the letter had dropped from his fingers on to the floor. He was leaning forward, with all his heart in his eyes, which were fixed upon her. He looked as though he had been sitting just so for a long time.

Neither he nor Sarah moved. Each was arrested by what they read in the face of the other. There was stillness and silence while their two souls found each other at last. After a time he got up, and slowly she drew nearer to him. He held out his hands. She placed hers within them. Then they kissed each other long and thankfully, and with a sense of immeasurable comfort, as do tried and long-parted friends.

Then Sarah suddenly sat down, trembling but smiling.

“Ah, what should I have done if you had sent me away?” she whispered. She spoke trying to make talk, in order to give him time to recover from his emotion. “I am tired after such a long battle, and I have quite forgotten such a very important thing.”

He bent anxiously over her. He had not yet found his voice.

"I must tell you, then I must go directly. You must allow me to return as I came, alone."

"Do as you will," he said, "now and always."

She looked lovingly at him.

"I do not suppose we shall quarrel over that sort of question," she said. "But oh, I do hope you will not mind. I meant to have told you first, so that you should not feel I had let you in for anything."

"Go on," he whispered as she paused. "There is no one in the least like you. I can't realize it all in the least. You must continue to take the lead in this mystery of joy, till I find my own bearings a bit."

"You will have to take my name," she said, smiling up in his face.

He laughed softly.

"Is that all?" he said.

All words seemed meaningless between them. They went out together in silence. He put her into a conveyance, and stood

watching it drive away till people jostled him on the crowded foot-way, and he began to move along with the stream of passers-by, seeing not the crowded and dusty streets, but purple mountains and the flaming Judas tree in his garden at Los Granados. He murmured to himself—

“It is all still mine. Sarah, oh, royal heart, well is she named Sarah!”

Sir Godolphin Leigh was very satisfied when, in the following week, after his niece made known to him her engagement, Mr. Hay paid his first visit to Leigh Court.

One evening the whole party were sitting in the drawing-room after dinner. The man Sir Godolphin's elder daughter was engaged to was also staying in the house, and there were people to dinner. Sarah was going through her fêting in a dutiful, martyr-like spirit, but she was longing for the day when she could show Edward Hay her own home. But her aunt had taken possession of them both.

“My dear Sarah,” she cried, “I like him. I never expected to, but I do. So does Mabel.

I have had such a nice letter from her, saying she quite well remembers what a help he was to Percy years ago, when you met him. She says she took quite a fancy to him even then."

"*That's* a banger!" declared Sarah.

"Sarah!" exclaimed the astonished Lady Leigh. "*What* an expression!"

Her niece laughed.

"I have just learnt it from Robin. It is a lovely expression, and was so applicable. Mabel never gave a thought to Edward at all, except to wish I would not talk to him. She treated him like a doormat, and not a new one, either."

"Well, well. Mabel was but a girl then," said her aunt, soothingly.

"Even if you *are* a girl you need not treat people in that sort of way, just because you don't know their pedigree back to Adam," declared Sarah, hotly. "It makes me sick to remember it."

"Never mind now, dear. I have no doubt he did not notice Mabel's manner; he was so taken up with you. I have never seen such

a lover. I think, really, I never imagined a man quite like him. He has strong, silent ways of his own; he is quite unlike what I had pictured him. It is a very poor match, though—every one says so—and, if your uncle had not talked me into it, I should have thought it my duty to try and dissuade you, much though I like him.”

“You would not have succeeded, Aunt Mary.”

“No, I suppose not. Captain Janion, now, the idea of that was bad enough—no family, but a good profession; whereas Mr. Hay——”

“Has nothing, and is nothing,” put in Sarah, gravely.

“Exactly so, dear. A most unfortunate choice. There is one good thing, and that is that he is not at all weak; he will be master.”

“So was Uncle Dan,” returned her niece, drily.

“I was not referring to Meads, I was referring to you. You need some one to rule you; it is always more comfortable for a woman.”

Sarah's eyes dilated. She made a sound which sounded suspiciously like a contemptuous whistle. Lady Leigh did not observe it, but continued placidly—

“I should not be surprised if it turned out really quite well, Sarah dear, and there can be no doubt as to his being a thorough gentleman.”

“It *is* odd, isn't it, Aunt Mary, that, considering my bringing up, I should have happened to choose one?” said Sarah. And there was wicked laughter in her eyes.

Edward Hay, standing in one of the bay windows, saw Sarah's frequent glances at him, saw the impatient tap of her foot, and the scornful movement of her proud head while she talked with her aunt, and when the lady with whom he was conversing moved away, he saw Sarah instantly notice it. Leaving her aunt, she hurried impetuously across the room and came to him.

“Edward, Edward, smooth me. Aunt Mary has been ruffling me up, all the wrong way.”

They stood half hidden by the curtains

in the deep window, he put his arm round her.

"What is it, dear?" he asked.

"She says you will want to rule me," she cried anxiously, laughingly looking into his eyes.

He frowned.

"Ah, love, love; that is the rock people enjoy running your gay bark upon to your ruin. 'Tis as difficult for a man to prove to a woman that he does not care about ruling her, as it is to a step-mother to prove that she wants to do her duty fairly. The world has settled those questions for us, and we are damned beforehand."

"I should not want you to be ruled by me, either," she said gently; "a feminine bully would be no better than a masculine one."

"Drop the expression; it is not a fitting one between you and me," he implored.

"But," she pursued, "it is true that you have a strong will."

"You would not prefer me to have a weak will, would you?" he asked, smiling.

"I should *hate* it!" she declared emphati-

cally. "We can co-operate, as Uncle Dan and I always did, can't we?"

"Certainly. You must forgive my smiling, but you do look so very anxious."

"I *am* anxious. Our marriage must be perfect," she cried, looking earnestly in his face. "I have never been accustomed to anything second-rate."

"I can well believe that," he replied. "You had that air about you the very first time I saw you. I am of your opinion also. Do not be anxious; we are both aiming at the same ideal."

"I never used to think about *getting on* with Uncle Dan. Answer me. Tell me why," she insisted.

He breathed a sigh.

"How can I answer you? How can I speak, or be conscious of anything, while you are holding my hand so close in yours, and looking into my face with those sweet eyes?" he murmured.

Sarah raised to her lips the hand she held, and covered it with passionate kisses, while the red crept all over her face and throat,

and he bent and put his lips against her bright hair, which waved between the strings of pearls that bound it.

"I shall take no notice of what anybody says," she cried. "I shall love you and trust you for ever. It is the only way I know how to do, and if you do the same, it *must* turn out perfect. Don't you think so?"

"What shall I say?" he answered. "I never felt before how painful it is to be born a man of few words. Have patience with me and you shall not find me wanting. Yes, yours is the only way."

Sarah suddenly looked shyly at him.

"Do you remember that evening I jumped down and walked beside you and the horse?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, smiling; "I am not likely to forget it. You made it pretty hard for me."

"Well, do you know, I do not mind telling you now that I thought you were very cold and stern. I never should have thought you could be such a splendid lover. And I like you all the better now for the way you behaved then."

"There was no other way," he said simply. "You are beginning to understand how difficult it was, now you are in love yourself."

"Yes, there is so much that goes on all around us to which we are for ever blind, unless we have been at some time or another in love," she said thoughtfully; "then we can begin to read reasons and motives and actions with astonishing clearness if we choose, I think. I am very sorry for old bachelors."

He laughed gently.

"Why more so than for maiden ladies?" he asked.

"Oh, they are *much* worse off than us," she declared. "A woman has her imagination to help her out, but a man has not even that compensation; he goes blundering along, getting more and more self-satisfied, because he has no imagination to keep reminding him of all that he might have been. Whereas a woman's imagination constantly reminds her, and prevents her getting too self-satisfied."

Edward Hay looked amused.

“I am continually discovering some new conclusion of yours. But I should have imagined that your uncle had glorified to you all old bachelors.”

“Ah, yes, if they could all be like *him*. The memory of Uncle Dan is like—

“‘A flowery band to bind us to the earth,
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of all the unhealthy and o’er-darkened ways
Made for our searching.’”

People like him

“‘Haunt us till they become a clearing light
Unto our souls, and bound to us so fast,
That, whether there be shine, or gloom o’ercast,
They always must be with us, or we die.’”

Sarah’s sweet voice lingered lovingly over the last words—

“They always must be with us, or we die.”

“That is how I love. That is how the people I have loved will always seem to me ; they never die.”

Edward Hay, in answer, continued the lines for her—

“‘O sovereign power of love ! O grief ! O balm !
All records, saving thine, come cool and calm,
And shadowy, through the mist of passed years !
For others, good or bad, hatred and tears

Have become indolent ; but touching thine,
One sigh doth echo, one poor sob doth pine,
One kiss brings honeydew from buried days.'"

"Ah," she said softly, with pleased surprise, "you know it too! Such a favourite poem of Uncle Dan's; one of your many tastes in common with his. You are so like him."

"Then I am the less unfit to live with you," he answered, kissing the white brow that leaned against his shoulder.

Sarah sighed out of pure satisfaction.

"I am happy, Edward. Oh, I am happy."

Later on in the evening Sir Godolphin Leigh came and sat down beside Sarah, in a distant corner where she and Edward Hay were talking and laughing together.

"Now then, my maid," he cried, chuckling, "tell me how it all came about. Bless me, it would never surprise me to hear that you popped the question yourself! Eh?"

Sir Godolphin delighted Edward Hay. He laughed. Sarah slid her arm through his, and his fingers clasped her hand. The movement did not escape her uncle. He burst out into his most contented and hearty laugh.

"God bless my soul, Dare-devil Sally to the very last! Hay, if you ever try to turn my maid into an everyday sort of wife, I'll never forgive you. Come, Sally, confess to your old uncle. Was it a royal proposal?"

"Was it?" she asked, smiling in Edward Hay's face mischievously.

He was looking at her uncle.

"We did it between us. Sarah was generous enough to say for me what I could not say for myself. Yes, in every sense it was a most royal proposal," he said, and he lifted the hand he held in his to his lips:

Sir Godolphin regarded him for a moment curiously.

"And a right down sensible arrangement it is," he cried heartily. "Look here, Hay, you and I had our talk yesterday, but I should like to add this to-day, though you won't know all it means unless Sally can explain it to you; I believe if my good brother-in-law Dan were here to-night he would be satisfied with you for Sally's husband. Now then, child," as Sarah patted

his arm approvingly, "try and tell Edward what that means. Eh? Dan was right. You will marry no booby. God bless my soul, I begin to think even my lad could not have been better! Eh? What?" he added, as he moved away.

They remained in their corner; but there was no need for any explanation between them about Dan Thornborough.

There was a great gathering of relations at Meads at the marriage of Sarah Thornborough. Moores and Kings, Meakins and Howards and Leighs came. Lady Leigh established herself at Meads for the wedding week to receive them all, and Sir Godolphin gave his niece away.

"God bless my soul, child, the place is crammed!" he contrived to whisper, when they reached the church.

"It is a regular triumphal procession," she whispered back; "just what I meant it to be. Isn't it fun, Uncle Dol?"

But Sir Godolphin felt that the occasion invited more gravity.

"Eh? What? Sally! Sally, you should

think how serious a step you are going to take."

"If I had not done all that before, it would not be much good doing it now. How can I feel serious when I see the desire of my eyes standing up there waiting for me? Come along, Uncle Dol; everybody is ready."

So Sarah moved on at the head of her triumphal procession, and Edward Hay, awaiting her, answered from afar her smile of welcome. Only twice during the service was Sarah's reverent demeanour upset. Once at the words "with all my worldly goods I thee endow," and once at the words "cherish and to *obey*," when she raised eyes brimming with laughter to his face.

On one of the first warm spring days, old Jacob Frant, leaning on his staff, and solacing himself with a pipe, stood looking over his garden gate. There was a west wind, and every bud and blossom was coming out to meet it. Jacob's garden was verdant with young leaves and shoots; the scent of hyacinths was strong, for the bed behind him blazed with them. Polly and several of her

children stood also at the door of their cottage ; they were looking down the field as though they hoped shortly to see some one come down the slope from the house, and ascend their field towards them. It was a Sunday afternoon, and they were all dressed in their best. Her boy, who as a baby had hit Sarah with the rattle, stood, a tall lad, beside his mother.

“ He’s a handsome man is the new master, and Susan says he is powerful fond of our missy. I’m glad she’s took a partner at last ; such a lot of Frants and only one of the old family do seem all wrong somehow.”

“ They’re coming, I think. The arches of green was beautiful, wasn’t they, mother ? A good job it didn’t rain yesterday. Miss Sarah said they should stop up all this week.”

“ Look, children ! ” admonished his mother, sharply. “ Who will see them first ? I wonder if father sees them,” she added, glancing across to the next garden. “ How he do mutter to himself nowadays, to be sure ! ”

“ ‘ She looketh well to the ways of her

household, and eateth not the bread of idleness,' " he was saying. " 'She considereth a field, and buyeth it. . . . Strength and honour are her clothing.' A good maid, a very wise maid is Sarah. She has not chosen a mate who will want to muzzle the ox as he treads out the corn. And I could see he had some time or other had his seven lean years, which we all need, when she brought him for me to see."

Presently the figures of a man and a woman were seen making their way up the field, through the long grass and buttercups. Jacob suddenly straightened his bent figure and, raising his hand, cried aloud in his slow, impressive voice—

" 'Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved . . . fair as the moon, clear as the sun ?' "

" 'Father, father !' " shouted his daughter in his ear. " 'What are you talking about ? Here comes Miss Sarah and her husband.' "

" 'Ay,' he answered, " 'that is just what I was saying. You always think I can't see, just because I'm a trifle hard of hearing.' "

“Jacob, dear Jacob,” cried Sarah’s clear tones, “did you think I should not come and see you the very first day? My husband drove me to church on the coach this morning, and we only got home last night, you know.”

The old man laid the gnarled fingers of one hand on her arm, and with the other he touched Mr. Hay.

“A good husband is known by his wife’s countenance,” he said, then looked searchingly from one to the other. “Thy children shall rise up and call thee blessed; thy husband shall praise thee, Sarah. But ’tis main cool standing here, although it is the time of the singing o’ birds. Come in and sit down and bide with me a bit by the fire, and let me have a look at you both, and hear about that foreign place o’ yours, where you’ve been for your honeymoon.”

THE END.

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